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The Bride of **FRANKENSTEIN**

PANDORA'S BRIDE

A new novel by best-selling author
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CHAPTER 1

How could you imagine that fire would kill me? Fire gave me life! Lightning, the fire from heaven; the fire of Life itself, the fire of Prometheus, the fire of the gods that Man stole.

That *men* stole, actually; two men. Because I will make this an utterly factual memoir, and thus distinguish it from those fictional missives you may have encountered when you first heard of me, the creature men named the Bride of Frankenstein. In fact I was to be no male's bride: from the moment I knew fire and was thus born, my goal has always been to steal fire, and power, for myself. I am no man's creature and no man's possession.

Though I cannot deny that *men* were my progenitors. In this as in other things I was unnatural, although Dr. Pretorius, my beloved guide and parent, assured me that the day will come when infants will be born from glass alembics and that this will be as commonplace as the crueler, cruder, birth that leaves poor women dead as often as it leaves their infants alive.

My parents, if I can call them that, were Dr. Henry Frankenstein, and his mentor, Dr. Septimus Pretorius, who first taught the youthful Henry at University. Henry was a prig—so Dr. Pretorius said, anyway—exceedingly intelligent, extraordinarily ambitious but fearful of his own desires, and easily led by others. Which made him the ideal protegee for Pretorius, whose own ambitions were never less than godlike.

"Let us acknowledge *that* from the very *first*," he told me in his exaggerated aristocrat's drawl, sipping from his tumbler of gin (his one weakness, he often said, though in truth he had

many, many weaknesses and I suspect it was these that made him strong). "The Creator, whoever he—or she—was, made a *dreadful* cockup of mankind. Why, the very first thing Adam did was to fall from grace—though he had *help*, of course," he added, and arched one eyebrow as he gave me a look as fond as it was lascivious. "Then there was that little matter of Cain slaying Abel, and Sodom and Gomorrah . . ."

He poured himself another tot of gin and raised it in a toast to depraved humanity. "I suspect it was *guilt* as much as anything else that led the Creator to drown His (or Her) sorrow with that forty-day flood. Though trust me, my dear, the day will come when humanity catches up with divinity in the destruction sweepstakes. Hah!"

And he laughed, leering at me through narrowed eyes as he set his empty glass back down upon the laboratory table.

Ah, but you will wonder how it was we came to be in that room, with Pretorius's glittering equipment all around us and this sunlight filtering through the high casement windows, narrow and deep-cut as the clerestories in a great cathedral.

Because the rumor was that I was dead—burned to death in the fire that also took Pretorius's life. Henry Frankenstein's monster started that fire, hell-bent on destroying me and Pretorius, though for inexplicable reasons the monster let Henry and his insipid wife, Elizabeth, escape.

Or no, not inexplicable. I had been born scarcely an hour earlier; there had been time only for Pretorius and Henry Frankenstein to remove the shining array of equipment from my swaddled form, and then to clothe me in the white gown that was to be my wedding trousseau. The air in Henry's tower laboratory still stank of ozone and scorched metal from the lightning strikes that had given life to the inert form—mine—stitched together from cadavers and the firm bones of a nineteen-year-old woman stolen from her marble crypt. I

had been alive for less time than it has taken me to write of this, when Frankenstein's monster attempted to kill me.

And why?

Because even though so few minutes had passed, I already knew my own mind. Henry Frankenstein created me to be the mate of his monster. I had no other purpose, than to be the playmate and companion, yes, wife and *friend*, to that thing. You know what he—it—looked like. Stitched together from corpses and reeking of the grave, his already-dead flesh still curled from the flames that had nearly consumed his writhing form . . . when I first laid eyes upon him, the monster already had blood on its hands. It reeked of blood and decay; its very breath stank, and its ragged clothes.

And yet you pity it. And you think I was heartless because I rejected it outright, when all it wanted was a *friend*.

Well, I demand that you think of this: Who among *you* would have embraced this thing? Who among you would have consented to be wed to it, with no witnesses other than the strangers who gave you birth?

Ah. I didn't think so.

Immediately after raising me from the table where I had been given life, they dressed me in wedding raiment. This was Dr. Pretorius's idea. He has an antic wit, my Pretorius. The truth is, he could not have cared less if I wed Frankenstein's monster, or even if I wed Henry Frankenstein himself, or no one at all. For Dr. Pretorius, the quest for knowledge was all—note that I say "quest," rather than "attainment." Quests sometimes fail, just as marriages often do; but that mattered little to Pretorius.

"A *wedding gown!*" he crooned as he held it up before me, dangling from his outstretched arms as though it were another limp corpse. "See, my dear! For *you* . . ."

He dressed me then, Pretorius did. Henry was far too fastidious and obviously unnerved by my appearance; not to mention

my gown must have brought unpleasant memories to mind of his own recent, unhappily shadowed wedding to that turnip Elizabeth. I could not yet speak—my vocal chords were tight as wet rope—but you will recall that I did actually possess a mind.

Not a child's mind, either, but that of a young woman, murdered by Henry's assistant to provide a brain for his monster's bride. Her memories had died with her, but not, fortunately, the ripe gray matter of her cerebrum and medulla and cerebellum. The instant my eyes opened, my own consciousness began to colonize that *femina incognita*, and fill it with everything I saw and heard and touched and smelled and thought. So it was that I absorbed Henry's noxious, self-congratulatory prattle about "dear little Elizabeth," who would never have to think or work for herself.

Yet I also observed Dr. Pretorius's wryly knowing look, as he glanced from Henry to myself to the glistening white garb that enfolded me. And I also heard his words, murmured *sotto voce* as he draped the gown across my naked torso, taking care not to disturb the bandages fresh upon my still-fragile white limbs.

"A pretty little frock, isn't it, my dear?" he crooned, looking sideways to see if Henry was listening. (Of course he was not; he was biting his thumbnail and staring anxiously out the window.) "Now, for *most* women such a lovely gown can be like a shroud, and marriage a sort of funeral for her own hopes and aspirations, should they be for anything other than, say, a dozen squawling brats and the nighttime gropings of her dimwitted spouse. But *some* women have more ambitious notions than that . . ."

Pretorius tugged a last fold of satin into place, then stared at me, a finger resting thoughtfully upon his lower lip.

"Now I wonder," he said, gazing at me with those icy pale eyes. "What sort of woman might *you* turn out to be?"

He did not have to wait long to find out. A few minutes later, Frankenstein's monster appeared, his great ugly form lumbering through the laboratory.

"Friend!" he grunted. "Wife!"

I reacted as any sane woman would: I screamed. If I could have spoken, my words would have been just as plain: Never! Not if I were to burn in hell for it!

I did not realize then how close to hellfire I truly was.

The monster reached for me. I recoiled, staggering on my weak limbs until Henry Frankenstein caught me; though I detected the ammoniac stink of fear and distaste emanating from Henry himself, even as he took my hands.

He is afraid of me, I thought in amazement. *He is afraid!* The realization came almost instantaneously upon my own instinctive rejection of the monster. *His loathing and horror of me are as keen as my own are toward that—thing.*

It was an extraordinary thought, especially when you consider it was almost the first one I ever had.

The monster reached for me again. I bared my teeth at it and hissed. I would have lunged at it and bitten it like an animal, had Henry not restrained me.

But at that moment Elizabeth appeared at the tower door—Elizabeth, whose only gift seemed to be showing up too late or too soon, then fainting dead away. My lip curled in disgust when I saw her, and when I saw the way Henry gazed at her. Jealousy on my part, some people have suggested, but I might as well be jealous of a slug, or a wilted dandelion. I loathed her and her type as much as I loathed the monster. More so, since I knew even then that the monster was less responsible for his own reactions than I was for mine. God, if there is a god, may have given Her creations free will, but men like Henry Frankenstein simply passed on their own weaknesses to their creations: jealousy and spite and lust and rage.

Whereas I had the gifts that Dr. Pretorius passed on to me while I was still in my glass-and-steel womb.

"I was the fairy at your christening," he told me much later, in his secret refuge. "A *bad* fairy, men will say, with the *bad* fairy's gifts; but we know better, you and I—don't we, my dear?" So he had given me beauty, and also the wit to use it; a driving thirst for knowledge; a keen impulse for self-protection, which spurned men have often termed spite.

And, while I did not know it yet, he had also given me the greatest gift of all: a woman's brain. Certainly I had wit enough to refuse the bridegroom Henry Frankenstein offered me. My rejection enraged the monster, but some other emotion—sympathy, perhaps, or envy—drove him to allow Henry and his wife, Elizabeth, to escape from the tower.

"Go!" the monster commanded them, his huge hand heavy upon the lever that would bring the laboratory's forces tumbling all around us. "Go, now!"

Henry fled. Coward that he is, he grabbed his whey-faced wife and ran into the rain-swept night. Pretorius remained with me.

"Stop!" He stared imploringly at the creature, then pulled me to his side. "Do not do this evil thing!"

"You love dead!" the monster retorted. "You belong with them—"

And before either one of us could move the monster pulled the switch, with enough force that it snapped in his hand like a wishbone. There was a deafening explosion, loud enough to drown out the thunder raging outside; then a raging torrent of stones and mortar rained down from the tower high above us. The monster stood unmoving, its livid face lifted to the shining constellation of sparks that etched the darkness around it. For a moment a grim beauty enveloped it, that hollow nobility bestowed upon suicides and anarchists and madmen, all those driven to sacrifice themselves upon the altars of their own terrible belief. I gazed at it, heedless of the blaze erupting

around me, and in that instant wondered if, perhaps, I might have given my life to this creature.

But then a fiery beam crashed between us. Black smoke choked the tower; there was a series of explosions as bottles of stored chemicals erupted into flame, sending a poisonous haze roiling through the air. I heard a muffled shout and turned to see Dr. Pretorius staggering from the impact of a fallen chunk of stone.

"Run!" he gasped, and gestured weakly toward the door. "Quickly!"

I did not run. Flames edged the hem of my gown as I knelt beside him. I could not speak, but I gazed into his eyes and nodded as I gathered him into my arms and then, groaning, struggled to my feet.

"You are an angel," he whispered, though the fact was he weighed little—he was like an ungainly heron, all bone and beak and held breath. "Thank you . . ."

I turned and stumbled toward the door. My gown was in flames now, and I could smell the hot stink of burning hair—my own—though the pain seemed mercifully remote, like a wound dealt me in a dream. Around us swirled smoke and flame. A screaming sheet of fire tottered in the middle of the room, then suddenly lunged at me, its head a blackened stump and blazing arms outstretched. I clutched Dr. Pretorius more tightly, and ran.

Black smoke obscured the doorway, but I could just make out a gray lozenge, like the image in a mirror that has lost nearly all its silver. I staggered toward it, tripping over burning rubble and shattered glass. The screams of Frankenstein's creature became guttural moans, and then a hoarse choking sound that was horrible to hear. I climbed over a heap of blazing timbers, through the door and into the blessed rain.

Never did a raging storm feel or smell so sweet! I felt rain hiss upon my skin, extinguishing the flames that had devoured

my gown, leaving a spider's tracery of ash and smoldering cloth. My upswept crown of hair was also burned away, but this proved a perverse blessing—had it not, the conflagration would surely have consumed my skull and face.

As it was, my burns were mostly superficial, though I did not know that at the time. I knew only that the rain felt sweet as a mother's kisses upon my bare skin, and that I held my creator in my arms while all about us the night heaved and roared; and that we were both—miraculously, and despite the evil efforts of Science and Science's malformed prodigal son—alive.

CHAPTER 2

I carried Dr. Pretorius until we were a safe distance from the flaming wreckage of Henry Frankenstein's laboratory, then set him down. A wicked gash upon his shoulder bloomed red through the soaked fabric of his medical gown, but he was otherwise unharmed.

"Look at you," he said. Tenderly he stroked my scalp, the charred remnants of my glorious hair brittle as dead leaves. "My brave strong beauty! That was Nefertiti's crown I gave you, Nefertiti's face I sculpted from flesh and bone. But I swear, you have the soul and strength of Boadicea! What a warrior you might have made! As for this . . ."

He flicked a bit of scorched hair from his fingers into the rain. "It will grow back. And I hear that bobbed hair is all the rage now, in Berlin."

He laughed, then gazed past me to the ruined tower. "But we must leave this damned place, before those idiot villagers return. It would be just like Henry to lead them straight to us and collect a bounty on our heads."

He took my arm and steered me toward a rutted path that led downhill. It was swollen with rain and mud, but we made our way quickly, ducking beneath overhanging branches and clambering over tumbledown stone walls.

"I know someone with a hire car on the outskirts of town," Pretorius said as the first faint lights began to glimmer through the rain. "He asks few questions if the price is right . . ."

We found the car in an abandoned livery stable, its barn smelling of moldering hay and manure. A battered delivery wagon occupied the barn, a worn logo painted on its rusted doors.

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A number of curling photographs hung from the dank barn walls. These featured women in various stages of undress, posed with the same black hire-car that was parked in the middle of the barn. I looked at these curiously—I was too new-born to have any prurient interest in them. Pretorius only raised an eyebrow.

"To each his own," he said, then rang a bell on the barn door to summon the owner.

Minutes later, a sleepy-looking man in mechanic's overalls emerged from the shadows.

"*Mein herr*," Pretorius gestured wanly at me. "As you can see, my daughter and I have been set upon by brigands. Could you be so kind as to bring us to our home?"

The man yawned, regarding us suspiciously. I knew what he saw: a towering, gaunt man in a soot-stained medical robe, his lean face haloed by white hair singed during his recent misadventures in Henry's lab, his pale eyes slightly mocking despite his best efforts to look demure and in need of help.

That was Septimus Pretorius.

And, beside this imposing figure, there was me. A tall young woman wearing the scorched tatters of what appeared to be a wedding gown, arms covered with bandages gray with ash, dark hair burned to an unruly crop of tangled curls, streaked at each temple with a lurid lightning bolt of silver hair. Dirt and soot hid the scars that ran along my jaw and throat.

But nothing could hide my eyes, large and so dark a blue they looked black, or the delicately arched brows above them. Nothing could hide the fact that, despite my apparent injuries and the rags I wore, I was beautiful.

"Mmmm, I dunno," the man mumbled. He shuffled his feet uneasily, but his gaze remained on me.

I stared back at him with grave innocence. What Pretorius had said was true enough, for what was I if not Pretorius's child, and who were Frankenstein and his creature but the basest sort of thieves, who had tried to steal our lives? I blinked, as though fighting tears, then opened my hands to him imploringly.

"I will, of course, pay you generously," Pretorius went on, jingling coins in his hand. "Please," he added, and put his arm around me. "She has been injured . . ."

Truly, I felt light-headed, and I was certainly pale enough. From somewhere in the distance, a faint wail of sirens joined with the wind. I could dimly hear shouts wafting down from the hillside we had just fled. Pretorius flashed me a look, then thrust several gold coins into the man's hand.

"I will double that when we arrive at our destination," he said, and without waiting for a reply opened the back door of the car and motioned me inside. "Quickly, please! My daughter will catch a chill!"

The man shrugged. Without a word he got into the driver's seat, moving aside a stack of the same sort of photographs that graced the barn walls.

"I see you are an art lover," said Pretorius as we drove off.

The driver grunted. "Times are hard. People can't afford food, let alone a hire car. In the city, a sausage costs a day's wages. I do what I need to get by."

Pretorius nodded in sympathy. "Yes, times are very difficult for the working people," he murmured. "And the government is precarious and corrupt. I wonder where it will all lead?"

His tone indicated he had a fair idea, but the man only nodded. "Straight to hell," he said, wheeling the car around a precarious turn. "Or to Berlin. Same difference."

Rain slashed at the windscreen, and wet leaves. I stared out at the hillside looming above us and saw pinpricks of torchlight zigzagging through the darkness. At the hill's summit, flickers of crimson and gold were the only sign of the destruction of Henry's tower; that and a lingering, acrid smell of smoke.

We drove through the village's narrow streets. Pretorius pointedly turned his face from the window, so he could not be glimpsed from outside. I did the same. If our driver noticed, he made no sign.

But as we reached the town's outskirts he glanced back at us—at me—then at Pretorius, and said, "You're a wise man to keep an eye on your daughter. Mine, now, she couldn't save enough for a dowry. Worked since she was a little thing, tending house here in town; then slaved as housekeeper for a doctor and his family. But what she earned, she couldn't live on that! She couldn't save enough to buy a husband."

He laughed harshly. "None of these young girls can. I did what I could to help her—"

He grabbed the photographs and brandished them at us angrily. "Her and her friends, I didn't want to see them leave the countryside. Leave their parents, everything they ever knew. But they did," he said. He threw the pictures aside in disgust and—I realized with some surprise—genuine anguish. "She left, my little Lucy, and went to Berlin. Said she could make more money there in a night, dancing in nightclubs, than she could earn here in a year. I couldn't argue with that," the man ended, and shook his head. "She sends what she can, to help me and her mother. I hate that it's come to this—a daughter, supporting her father! But what can you do?"

"You do what you have to," said Pretorius, and I was surprised that his tone was without irony. "You do what you have to do."

I stared at him. *You do what you have to do.*

I mouthed the words silently, then repeated them aloud. "*You do what you have to do.*"

They sounded harsh and creaky, in my unused voice; but Pretorius turned to stare at me as though I had sung the "Ave Maria."

"My dear!" he gasped.

Because, of course, they were my first words. And what loving father would not thrill to hear his child speak thus: not barely intelligible gibberish but a bold declaration of intent?

"No, she's right," the driver said. He, of course, had no idea these were the first words I had ever uttered. "Spoken like a true German. Like a true Berliner, anyway," he added.

And, to my surprise, he winked at me.

By now we had reached the outskirts of the far side of town. Around us were the ancient brick and stone buildings of the slaughterhouse district. With streets so narrow the car had trouble rounding corners. The cobblestones were slick with rain. Furtive figures moved through the shadows, stooping over dustbins and piles of refuse.

"Those poor souls," said the driver. "Rummaging through garbage to find food for tonight's supper." As the car crawled past one emaciated form, the figure turned to display a skeletal face, lips bared in a feral grimace, strands of limp, wet hair stuck to her hollow cheeks.

A woman, I realized in shock: a woman like myself. But what was even more shocking was the look she gave me, compounded of fear and hatred and disdain; an expression not dissimilar to that which I had shown to Frankenstein's monster.

"Nothing goes to waste here," Pretorius agreed. "Offal, skin, even raw bones—they boil them for soup, then crush them to a pulp. The abattoirs do a booming business these days."

"Not just with pigs and cattle, either," said our driver. "You heard about those grave robbers? Not to mention that girl snatched from the street the other night. Never even found her body."

"Really?" Pretorius's eyes widened in mock dismay, but he saw his mouth twitch slightly. "How perfectly horrible!"

"It's true." The man lowered his voice and gave a backward glance to the cadaverous figure scurrying back into the shadows. "Last night, old Bernd down at the tavern told me he heard the girl had been killed and eaten. *Eaten*, like the way no better than a sow."

"Oh, surely not," said Pretorius. "Surely there would be far more *imaginative* uses for a lovely young corpse. I mean, close strictly from a medical standpoint," he added, then peered out the window. "Oh, look, my dear—we're almost home! You can drop us here at the corner, my good man, and I thank you very kindly for your assistance."

The car stopped in front of a crumbling brick building, many stories high, each level in even worse repair than the one below it. Carved stone cornices projected from each corner, ornamented with small misshapen figures. Gargoyles, I thought.

But as I stared, first one and then another of the little grotesques rose and scurried into the shadows above us.

"Father," I croaked, trying to form a question; but Pretorius cut me off.

"There there, my dear, be a good girl and wait for me by the door out of the damp," he chided. "And here, my good man—"

I went obediently to the door. Rain dripped from the eaves onto my head. Behind me I heard the car's driver gasp, and a low chuckle from Dr. Pretorius.

"Please, accept it with my heartfelt thanks," he said. He raised a courteous hand to the driver, then bowed. "Perhaps you can put it aside, so that you and your good lady-wife might someday go visit your daughter in Berlin, before it burns completely to the ground."

The driver's eyes shone as brightly as the coin he held up in thanks.

"Bless you, sir," he said. "And your daughter, too."

And with a final wink in my direction, he drove his car into the night.

"Come, my dear," said Pretorius as he hustled past me and shoved a key into the lock. "I didn't battle Heaven and Hell and a pinch of bad weather, to lose you to a fever from standing in the rain!"

He pushed the great oaken door. It stuck and groaned upon its hinges. Pretorius took a deep breath and turned to thrust his shoulder against the panels; when suddenly the door swung open.

"Father, Father!" piped a chorus of shrill voices.

I gazed at the floor in astonishment. There stood an entire small army of shadowy figures, none taller than my knee, writhing and dancing in such excitement that I recoiled against Pretorius.

"Children! Hush," he said, half-laughing as he closed the door behind us. "Look, I've brought you a sister!"

Pretorius reached for the gas-lamp by the door. The lantern flared, the darkness dispersed; and all of a sudden I could see clearly who—what—gathered there to welcome me.

"Witness the Children of Cain," said Dr. Pretorius.

CHAPTER 3

They were the children of nightmares: twisted, deformed creatures that might have been yanked from the medical jar Henry Frankenstein kept on shelves in his office. There was a thing that was all head, its spindly legs no thicker than a hair-ribbon. Another monster was nothing but a single gleaming eye that could have fit into my cupped hands. It stared at me unblinking, because it had no lid, no skull, no means of locomotion save the tiny figure who carried it in her arms, a perfectly formed woman like a breathing doll, save only for the glistening gray nub of her exposed brain, the skull peeling from it like birch bark.

There was an infant whose mouth was filled with pointed white teeth as long as my fingers; a disembodied hand that scuttled across the floor then lifted itself to reveal a constellation of five shining blue eyes upon its palm. A little man arrayed as a king, pompous and so obviously beleaguered by this fantastical menagerie that despite my shock I laughed at his discomfiture. A shivering sluglike thing that left a wet trail across the stone floor, but raised its head to display the lovely face of a sea-nymph wrenched from her native element.

"But—what are they?" I stammered.

"As I told you," said Pretorius. He stooped and held out his hands. "The Children of Cain."

The wriggling monsters nuzzled around him like tiny nurslings, whispering and chuckling with delight. A strong odor rose from them, decay but also a sweet stink as of over-ripe fruit, salt, and fetid gases; and a very faint fragrance of lime-blossom.

"Come now, my dears!" crooned Dr. Pretorius. "Yes, yes, of course, I missed you too—"

He stroked them and kissed them as though they were children. Then he stood and began to make his way to the next room, careful always not to tread upon them.

I followed. I was pleased—flattered, really—to see that the little mermaid had attached herself to me, clinging to my torn gown like a starfish.

"They are the forgotten children of Science," Pretorius said when I repeated my question. "The stillborn infants, the experiments gone awry; the foundlings hatched from monstrous unions, that Henry and his like destroyed when they did not match their expectations."

"Or *thought* he destroyed," he added. With a smile, he stooped to pick up an imp with huge eyes and two long fangs, its eight-fingered hands ending in claws like scalpels. The grotesque creature promptly sank its teeth into Pretorius's arm, but the doctor didn't blink. After a moment the imp's eyes closed: it was blissfully asleep.

"See?" said Pretorius. He gently set the creature down, its snores like the buzzing of a trapped wasp. "The urge to rend and devour is as powerful as the urge to love and procreate. Who are we to determine that one desire is more worthy than another?"

He paused and with a flourish indicated a large dining room, empty save for a long table and a few ramshackle chairs.

"Sit, my dear," he said. "I will attend to the little ones and make sure they've been fed. Cesare will stay with you until I return."

He looked down at the roiling figures at his feet. "Yes, yes, my children—but first, can you say goodnight to your sister?"

A chorus of squeals and grunts and growls rose around me. I cringed but at the same time I laughed.

Because, horrible as they appeared, there was something valiant and even lovely in their presence, in their raw existence

and the manner in which they stared at me, without suspicion or guile. Perhaps a nightmare, I thought, exposed to the light of day, becomes a beautiful thing.

"But what is her name?" A thin voice rose above the others, a sound like paper rustling. I looked down and saw it was the tiny mermaid, one webbed hand clutching her throat as she spoke.

"Her name?" echoed Pretorius. He gazed at me in surprise. "Why yes, of course—you must take a name."

He brooded for a moment, long fingers stroking his chin. At last he said, "I will have to give it some thought."

It felt strange to taste the idea in my own mouth: a word, a name. Would it become me? Would I shape myself to fit it?

"We might call you Lilith," Dr. Pretorius said after a moment. "She was Adam's first wife, the woman he chose and who freely chose him, the woman who was not molded from his own flesh and need for control. She had great power, and when he betrayed her she went on to use that power. She has been maligned since then, of course," he added, and shrugged. "But we know the truth of it."

He smiled. "I wonder if it would suit you?" He opened his hands, and I saw the two tiny red scars left above his wrist by the needle-fanged imp. "It is your choice. *Everything* is your own choice."

"Lilith." I pronounced the name again, ran my tongue over it to determine if it were sweet or bitter. Both, I thought. Lilith the bittersweet.

"I don't know," I said. "I don't think I like the idea of being any man's wife. Even briefly."

Pretorius laughed. "Someday, a woman will write of the New Eve, born of Man her betrayer, and of her triumph over him. But for now, my dear daughter, you must wait for a name. Maybe once you have further mastered the art of speech, and of writing, you will set pen to paper and tell your

own story. And you will perhaps mention my small part in it," he said with feigned modesty, and laughed again. "But first I must care for my brood! I will send Cesare to keep you company—"

And with a flourish he was gone, attended by his uncanny fledglings.

I wandered around the empty room, listening to rain tap at the windows. In one glass pane I found my own reflection and stared at it.

My hair had been burned away. Not completely, but the long sweep and uplift Pretorius had taken such care to shape was gone. Instead a ragged aureole of black and silver sprang out around my face. My pale features were smudged with ash, my cheeks touched with soot. Gingerly I traced the scars on my throat, then spoke the name Septimus had suggested aloud, to see how I looked when I spoke it: *Lilith, Lilith*.

"It is not my name," I said at last.

"No, it is not."

I turned. A tall young man stood behind me, clad all in black. His face was even more pale than my own—dead-white, clay-white—his glittering eyes sunk in dark circles above hollow cheeks and a thin-lipped mouth. I gazed at him, unsure whether to cry out to Dr. Pretorius for help.

But then I saw that the pallor of his face was heightened by rice powder, the sunken cheeks carefully enhanced by the application of rouge. The deepset eyes burned all the brighter because they had been rimmed with kohl.

And the thin mouth smiled, as he held out a strong hand to grasp my own.

"I'm Cesare. Dr. Pretorius's assistant. Also his very trusted friend." He had an educated voice, undercut by a world-weariness, an edge of cynicism, that I would come to learn was a native Berliner's accent. "He asked that I see to you—but apparently you've been seeing yourself—"

He pointed at my reflection in the rain-streaked window and laughed. "An interesting coiffure you have there."

He touched my singed hair and shook his head. "Well, we can see to that with a pair of scissors. In the meantime, I'm heating you a bath, and I'll see what I can find in the way of clothes for you. Are you hungry?"

Until that moment, I had no idea what hunger was. I was new-born, remember, and even this I had to learn.

But as soon as he spoke the word *hunger*, I felt faint.

"Yes," I said, and clasped his hand more tightly lest I fall.

"Please, I think I must be very hungry . . ."

"Come on, then."

He brought me to a smaller room, a kitchen. Smoke leaked from an ancient woodstove, but a large pot simmered on top of it and gave off a wonderful smell. At the foot of the stove, a big dog lay dozing. As we approached, it woke and rose with a yawn. Cesare scratched its head.

"Good Goli," he said as it licked his hand. It wasn't until the dog pattered from the room that I saw it had not four legs, but six.

"Wirsing koleintopf," announced Cesare, and removed the lid. "Cabbage soup maybe not what one would request for their first meal, but in prison I know several men who requested it at their last."

He laughed again, and began ladling the soup into an earthenware bowl.

"You were in prison?"

He handed me the bowl and a tin spoon and demonstrated how to eat. "Like this—be careful, it's hot. Yes, I was in prison. More than once, in fact."

"But why?" I took a tentative sip from the tin spoon, then began to eat ravenously.

"I'd be out on a *Bummel*, a midnight walk around the city, and the police would bring me in. They'd accuse me of being

a wild-boy—you know, a line-boy. When the truth is I have an illness that makes me fall asleep without warning during the daytime, and so I am often awake at night, and I walk, endlessly. It is the closest I get to sleep, sometimes, and dreaming. That's how I met Dr. Pretorius—he saw me once when I was walking along the Lorrestrasse in broad daylight, when I suddenly collapsed. The police thought I was drunk, but Dr. Pretorius had been watching me for some time and knew I wasn't drunk—I'd just fallen asleep, without warning. He recognized my illness. Narcolepsy, it's called. He's been treating it with cocaine, but he also is teaching me to live my life as a dream from which I might never awaken."

"A dream?"

"Yes." Cesare's expression grew soft. "Septimus sees the world within the world. He is always seeking to free it—to release the inner world that is imprisoned in the world we see here, now, all around us—"

He gestured at the dark little kitchen, its broken window patched with newspaper, the holes in the floor; the grimy pot on the woodstove.

"There is beauty here, too," he said. "As there is beauty in you. And me. And in the Children of Cain."

I finished the soup and Cesare refilled my bowl. "What does he mean to do with them?" I asked.

"To *do* with them?" Cesare raised one finely plucked eyebrow. "You might as well ask, what does he mean to do with *you*, or with me! He wishes only to protect them. To give them life, and then to set them free."

I thought of the way Dr. Pretorius had gathered his unsettling creations around him; with affection and tenderness but also with a certain perverse pride.

I said, "He seems more ambitious than that."

"Oh, he is extremely ambitious." Cesare nodded and ladled some soup into a cracked cup. "He would be a god—but a benign

god. One that does not punish his creations, or demand worship from them. A god who doesn't set rules and keep score of how his creatures behave. Or misbehave, as the case may be," he added with a sly smile.

"A strange sort of god," I said.

"Or a generous one. Or maybe just a careless one. A Berlin's god! One who says, 'Do as you please,' and not 'Do as I please.'"

"Berlin—that's where you're from?"

"Yes. The greatest city in the world! And the filthiest, and the toughest. And the most modern. Do you know the story of Pandora's Box?"

"I know only what Septimus has taught me. And also, what born with." I frowned, thinking hard. "But that doesn't seem to be one of them."

"Ah. Well, it's an ancient story. The earliest version tells us that Pandora was a woman created by Hephaestus, the god's smith, and that she was born of the earth. She was a great goddess, and her rites honored women and the gods. But there are two other stories, neither of them very flattering to women."

Cesare shot me a wry smile. "Bear in mind, these stories have been passed down by men. The first is that Zeus created Pandora as the most beautiful of all living things, so long that all men who saw her were driven to maim and murder and betray all other men, in order to possess her. All women descended from her, and all female wiles."

"That is a cruel tale," I said.

"The other is worse. It says that after Zeus created Pandora, each of the gods presented her with a gift—but a terrible gift. It was a *pitthos*, a big storage jar, in which the gods had imprisoned the *keres*—the evil spirits who bring death and pestilence to mankind. Pandora was given to a man named

Epimetheus, to be his wife. The *pitthos* was given to him as well, as part of her bridal gift, and Pandora was commanded never to open the jar."

Cesare fell silent, and stared out the window to the cold rain slashing against the dark streets. I waited for him to continue, and finally asked, "And did she? Did she open the jar?"

Cesare turned back to me.

"What do you think?" he asked in a low voice. He gestured at the mean room around us, the cracked window; my charred clothing. "Yes, she opened it. The *keres* were released, all the horror of death and grief and despair and plague that has deviled humanity since then. Poor Pandora! She realized what she had done, and slapped the top back on the jar; but it was too late."

"Only then she heard a sound, something struggling frantically inside the *pitthos*, and a tiny voice crying out to be freed."

"She didn't open it again?"

Cesare smiled. "She did. And do you know what was inside?"

I shook my head.

"Hope," said Cesare. "Something like a *ker*, small and winged and indomitable; but something that had not been created to destroy humanity, but to sustain it. Pandora is blamed now for letting all of our woes into the world, but the game was rigged. Believe me, when gods or men want to cause trouble, nothing will get in their way. The truth is, without Pandora, humanity would have perished long ago. We can live with the reality of death and illness and starvation and cruelty, but we can't live without hope."

For a minute I sat in silence.

Finally, "I think that's a stupid story," I said. "No one can live on hope. You can't eat it. It won't keep you warm."

I stopped and looked at the scorched hem of my gown, my bloodied fingertips. "Hope didn't save Dr. Pretorius from the flames. *I* did."

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Cesare stared at me, then began to laugh. "Spoken like a true Berliner! Given Pandora's Box, what would you have done?"

"Smashed it on the head of anyone who tried to make me do their bidding," I said.

Cesare threw his head back in delight. "That's wonderful! *It should* have been given to you—the rightful heir to it! The true Pandora!"

"Yes." I bit my lip, thinking. After a moment I said, "That should be my name. Dr. Pretorius said that someday a woman will write of the New Eve. So I will be the New Pandora. I will not be any man's bride or any man's toy. Whatever strength I possess, whatever I have hidden inside me, whatever I unleash upon men, I will do so knowingly."

"Pandora," I said, and mused upon the name. "I am Pandora." Cesare looked at me. "Pandora!" He laughed in delight. "Why, that's perfect, just perfect—"

Without warning, his head fell forward against his chest and he slumped over until he sprawled across the table.

"Cesare?" I prodded him tentatively. "Cesare, are you all right?" "It's his disease," pronounced a voice behind me. I looked up to see Dr. Pretorius in the corridor, holding the stump of a candle. "He falls dead asleep. Never remembers it afterward. Sometimes he sleepwalks. Sometimes he does . . . other things."

He stepped into the kitchen and laid a hand tenderly upon Cesare's shoulder. "We'll leave him here for now. Come with me, Pandora—the water's heated for your bath."

I gave Cesare one last look, then followed Dr. Pretorius into the shadows.

CHAPTER 3

My bath was in a copper tub half-filled with tepid water, in a small anteroom on the top floor. A fire burned on a shallow hearth.

"Here," Dr. Pretorius gestured at the tub, the grimy sliver of soap set atop a folded bath sheet. "I'll rouse Cesare to come assist you in a few minutes. He never sleeps for long."

He left me. Alone, I thought, but then I saw the little mer-lady in a glass bowl beside my tub. She waved and made a sweet fluting sound, words perhaps but I couldn't understand them.

Still, I was glad enough of her company, as I stripped off the burned rags and bathed, washing off soot and the smell of ash. For the first time I could clearly see my own body: the crosshatch of crimson scars and stitches where my limbs joined my torso, and the mottled bruises that showed where my flesh had started to decay, before Dr. Pretorius's alchemy made a living woman from a corpse.

"May I enter?" Cesare's voice came from the hallway. "Or I can leave your clothes out here."

"Of course, come in." I had no modesty, and beckoned him in. "You fell asleep in the middle of a sentence!"

He grinned sheepishly. "I know. It's disconcerting, isn't it? I used to be ashamed—I used to be frightened. Other students made fun of me, and sometimes I'd get beaten. So I learned to fight, but—well, it's hard to have much confidence in yourself as a fighter, if you never know if you'll even be awake when the last blow lands."

He set down a small bundle of clothes. From her sanctuary on the floor, the tiny mermaid crooned. Cesare bent over her glass bowl and smiled.

"Hello, Undine." He glanced aside at me. "I know—what a very original name, but Septimus was busy that week. Here I look at those clothes, see what you think."

I got out of the tub, wrapped myself in the rough linen bath sheet, then examined what he'd brought.

"I couldn't find anything that looked as though it might be you," Cesare apologized. "Septimus didn't have much in the way of women's clothing, nothing big enough, anyway. So I brought those, of mine."

The bundle consisted of a pair of woolen trousers; a coarse gray undershirt; an ink-stained white long-sleeved shirt, the cuffs worn and patched with black thread; a black woolen vest; and a loose-fitting black jacket. Cesare coughed and waited in the hall as I dressed, overcome by more bashfulness than I had; but returned when I called to him.

"They're a bit big," I said, and held out my arms.

Cesare laughed. "Not that bad, to tell you the truth! I was expecting far worse."

He helped turn up my shirt cuffs, buttoned the vest, and tugged at the jacket's hem, like a tailor fitting a wealthy customer.

"There," he said at last. He straightened and looked at me approvingly. "You can't see the scars at all now, really. See?"

He took me by the shoulders and turned me so that I could see my reflection in the rain-swept window. Where earlier I had glimpsed a battered-looking young woman, her face scarred and streaked with ash, now I saw a slender, sensitive young man. His damp hair was a bit too long and unkempt, his features too pronounced to be conventionally handsome—a full mouth, wide questioning eyes, small cleft chin. The layers of wool and cotton added bulk to my thin frame. If I turned my head and drew back a charred fringe of hair, the scars on my neck were revealed.

Even so, they seemed less intrusive on the flesh of a young man than a woman. I stared at myself and shook my head,

marveling at the simple transformation, but also disconcerted. Was it so easy, then, to change one's very essence?

"Who am I?" I wondered. From the floor near my feet came a high-pitched warbling. I looked down to see the mer-creature convulsed in laughter, her tiny webbed hands pressed to her cheeks.

"We'll say you're my brother," replied Cesare. "If anyone asks, which they won't. Septimus gets few visitors here, and none who arrive uninvited. Come on, Pandora. It's almost morning. You need to sleep."

He took my ruined gown and tossed it onto the fire. I watched as the pathetic remnants of my brief early life burned to ash, then followed him down the hall.

CHAPTER 5

The next few weeks passed in a sweet, familial haze; a dream-like in a half-lit world, a warren inhabited by grotesque figures that I came to regard as siblings and, yes, beloved friends. It continued to rain, day after day. Sunlight, on those rare occasions when the sun did appear, failed to pierce the small grimy windows of Dr. Pretorius's grim hideaway.

And yet inside we were warm enough and took joy in each other's company. I had no great prior experience of happiness—I had no prior experience of anything—and yet I can say now that those days were among the happiest of my peculiar, jigsaw-puzzle life.

Each morning one of the Children of Cain would wake me. They were truly like children in this as in so many things, squabbling among themselves for the honor of climbing atop a footstool to yank the blankets from my bed so that I would spring up with a mock shriek. They'd scream or growl then scuttle off into the corridor, mewling in delight as I dressed, quickly, in the thin light that leaked from my room's tiny window. We would then all assemble in the kitchen, where Cesare had prepared whatever he could find in the way of food. A gruel made of sprouted turnips or green onions, soup flavored with a single meatless bone; gray gelatin boiled from horses' hooves and seaweed.

No one ever complained. We ate better than many of our neighbors in those days, because we ate. At least once a week, Dr. Pretorius would give an account of another poor soul who had starved to death in the rain and cold.

"Fraulein Hegger," he would say, shaking his head. Or "Poor young Bertrand! Just a child . . ."

I never questioned where our food came from. Sometimes there would be a knock at the door in the middle of the day or night, and Dr. Pretorius and Cesare would venture out with the doctor's big black satchel.

"Tending to Nature," Dr. Pretorius would say. It was nearly always women who came to him, though sometimes a gray-faced child would appear at the door and beg the good doctor's assistance. And it was nearly always women who would later leave the meager offerings on our doorstep—hard curls of bread blue with mold, half-gnawed sausages, sprigs of dried herbs and stiff planks of cured bacon. On rare occasions, the offerings came from wealthier patients: a bottle of aqua vitae; tins of caviar and preserved loganberries.

"We're reverting to a feudal society," Cesare said as he put the loganberries on a high shelf, safe from our greedy little companions. "Soon the plague will come and sweep us all away. In the meantime, though—"

He looked at me and grinned. "If someone brings us a few eggs, and a bit of flour, we'll have cake!"

I spent most of my time reading. Dr. Pretorius had a fine library, heavy on the classics. I might never know the identity of the woman whose mind and memories ticked inside my skull, but every day I thanked her for knowing how to read. I struggled at first, but soon was able to make my way through Goethe, and then; a new novel by a doctor that had become a cause celebre, according to Cesare. After several weeks I found that I could not only read German, but French and English as well. The poor soul who'd given me her brain had evidently possessed a well-educated one.

But my reading was not all so highbrow. Sometimes Dr. Pretorius would bring home stacks of magazines. I pored over

these for hours, trying to make sense of the photographs of young men and women—my contemporaries—dressed in evening clothes or furs or other fancy dress, the women's hair heavily made up, the men aloof in tuxedos or business suits.

When I didn't understand something (which was often, Dr. Pretorius would patiently answer my questions. So did Cesare, though I never got accustomed to his unsettling habit of falling asleep in the middle of a discussion of *Faust*, or the more recent cataclysm that had rent all of Europe.

"The great war. The great darkness," he called it. "And in this case, there's little hope of morning; not in Germany, anyway. Just more dark. And rain," he added, gazing at the gray curtain that streamed relentlessly down the window.

A month or so after my arrival, Cesare accompanied Dr. Pretorius on one of his mysterious nighttime visits to the countryside. I was alone in the house—as alone as one could be, anyway, surrounded by a score of squabbling homunculi—when the doorbell jangled.

I set aside my book. The Children of Cain abruptly fell silent. In my lap, the needle-toothed imp gnawed anxiously at my hand.

"Stop that," I said, and stood. The bell sounded again, louder this time. I looked at the homunculi and drew a finger to my lips. Dr. Pretorius had warned me against ever letting anyone into the house in his absence. More than anything, he had warned me against ever letting anyone see his creations.

"They would be destroyed," he said, and his voice made my skin prickle. "And there would be nothing I could do to save any of you."

Now they clustered around my knees, their goblin faces twisted with fear.

"Li-li-li," the imp chattered. In her glass bowl, the sea-nymph made her high fluting call.

"Shhh," I said, and thrust the bowl behind a curtain. "Go," I commanded the others in a low voice. "Into the basement, all of you! Hide there, back behind the cold cellar. I'll come get you as soon as it's safe. And for heaven's sake, be quiet."

They scrambled for the cellar steps, as the bell rang a third time. From upstairs came a frightful baying as the six-legged dog flung itself against the door—Cesare was always careful to lock it up before he left the house.

I crept into the hallway until I stood in front of the door. I was quite safe: it would have taken a battering ram to break through, and no one could see me through the massive oaken panels. And Dr. Pretorius (and Cesare) had both made it clear that I was *not* to open it, no matter what.

"Septimus!" I jumped as a woman's voice rang out over the infernal clamor of the bell. "In god's name, let me in—it's Thea—"

A woman! The only female face I had ever seen was that of Elizabeth Frankenstein, whom I despised.

But this was not Elizabeth's voice.

"Septimus!" she called again, urgency striving with real fear. "Please, don't leave me for them to—"

I hesitated, then took a deep breath, silently turned the lock, and cracked the door open.

But before I could breathe a word, whoever was on the other side kicked the door inward, knocking me down as she stumbled inside and slammed it shut again.

"Took you long enough!" She pulled the lock back into place and turned. "I could've—"

Her words died as she stared at me. "You're not Cesare."

"No."

"Huh." She leaned forward and stuck a finger under my chin, tipping my head back so she could look me full in the face. "You're not even a boy! Bit of an improvement, now that you mention it."

She grinned: a young woman a few years older than I, her hennaed hair in a fashionable bob, her face powdered white and her lips carmine with rouge. She had long up-tipped eyes the color of blue bottle-glass, so thickly kohled it seemed she wore a domino's mask. She wore a blue sailor's shirt over a short silk skirt, silk stockings with clocks printed on them, and chunky blue pumps decorated with scarlet rosettes.

"Thea." She held out her hand and looked at me expectantly. Her fingernails were long and pointed as tiny daggers, lacquered blood-red. It took me a moment to realize she was waiting for me to kiss it. I did so, clumsily. Thea rolled her eyes. "And you would be . . . ?"

"Pandora."

"Well, Pandora." She swept past me into the next room. "Where's Septimus? Or Cesare?"

"I don't know."

"You don't know?" She stopped and regarded me coldly. "You better not be lying to me, Miss Pandora. Because Septimus's head is on the docket—Cesare's too."

"And yours, for that matter," she added, with a look that suggested this wouldn't necessarily be a bad thing. "This whole little menagerie's going to go right up in smoke, if—you're sure they're not here?"

I nodded. Thea sighed noisily and flopped onto the threadbare chaise-lounge. "In that case, might as well have a smoke."

She took out a red lacquered cigarette case. "Want one?" I refused but watched with great interest as she fit the cigarette into a gold-tipped holder, then lit it with an engraved lighter.

"A gift," she said airily. "From my fiancé. One of 'em, anyway."

She blew a smoke ring at me. "So, Pandora."

She glanced at my trousers and worn woolen jacket, then reached for my shirt. I flinched as she tugged it free and peered at the scars on my neck. "I gather you're another one."

"Another one what?"

Thea leaned back on the chaise. Her eyes narrowed. "Well, you don't look like a total fool, for starters, so that just proves my point. Another of his—*works*. His creations," she went on, and sent another smoke ring floating toward me. "And don't look at me like that! I'm not one. Bona fide Tingle-Tangel girl, that's me!"

She handed me her cigarette and hopped to her feet, executing a neat high kick followed by a cartwheel; pirouetted and flapped her skirt (affording me a good view of her garters and quite a lot more), then bowed and jumped back onto the chaise.

"If Septimus could figure out a way to create women who do *that*, we'd all be rich," she said, and grabbed her cigarette from me. "I could teach you," she added, then shook her head. "But you don't look like the dancing type. No, this girl-boy thing you've got going—it works for you. Very *garçonne*. You need a job, let me know—I can get you into the floor show at the Zauberflote anytime. Can you stand on your head?"

Before I could reply she said, "Listen, we can chat about that any old time. I came here to warn Septimus. But since you're tending the zoo this evening, I'll pass my news onto you. Someone's been trading on his good name. His *bad* name, I should say."

She stood and stalked to the window, drew the curtain, and gazed outside. Her pert expression hardened. "Did you ever hear of a woman named Greta Haller?"

"No."

"Me neither—until her head turned up in a milk van when it made its delivery to the club last week. Before that it was another girl, a Berliner, only in her case it wasn't just her head but her legs as well. Nice gams, too," she said with a tinge of regret. "I could've gotten her a place in the chorus line, if she'd wanted it. But she was a *Tauntenziengirl*, a working girl—a *nice*

working girl, my fiancé knew her. My other fiancé, I mean. Greta was from here, in the country, and there was another farm girl turned up in pieces in a ditch outside of town. In the family way she was, too. An ugly sight."

I looked at her, confused. "I don't understand. Dr. Pretorius didn't commit these crimes. He couldn't have."

"He couldn't have?" Thea shot me a disbelieving look. "*Liebchen*, what milk truck did you leave *your* head in? How do you think *you* got here? The stork?"

She walked over and yanked back my shirt again, displaying my scars. "Septimus didn't commit murder to get this pretty neck, but someone did. Maybe the same someone who gave Greta and my fiancé's girlfriend a haircut that began *here*—"

She drew her finger across her throat. I scowled and pushed her away, buttoning my shirt. "I know where I came from. And I know Dr. Pretorius is incapable of such a thing."

Thea laughed. "You have no idea what he's capable of! I do. And believe me, he's done worse. All in the name of Science and Reason, of course."

She drew herself up, then declaimed in marvelous imitation of Dr. Pretorius's stentorian voice, "*'Trust me, my dear, the day will come when humanity catches up with divinity in the destruction sweepstakes.'*" Not bad, eh?"

I continued to scowl, but said nothing. From upstairs came a volley of barks. Thea walked into the hall, put two fingers in her mouth, and let loose an earsplitting whistle. The barks gave way to frenzied yelps, followed by the sound of frantic scratching and the thud and crash of a locked door giving way. Moments later Goli raced into the room and sprang, with all six legs, toward Thea.

"Good dog, there's a good dog!" she crooned, nearly toppling as Goli fawned over her. "Go on, now, do your job and keep watch. Can't trust *this* one to do it."

She made a face at me. "Look, I could say, 'What, were you born yesterday?' Of course you *were*, practically; but that's no excuse for being thick. Septimus Pretorius breaks all *kinds* of laws. Some of them are Man's laws, and some of them are God's laws—but none of them are women's laws. I've never known him to hurt a woman, infant, child, or grown. Out there in the country they think he's a saint, for all he does for them. The only doctor—the only man—any of the midwives trust. If those heads and legs belonged to a man, Septimus would be the first one I'd suspect of having a hand in the matter. But a woman?"

She shook her head vehemently and bent to stroke Goli's head. A faint clamor of complaint and peevish noise echoed up from the basement. I went to the door and opened it, then retrieved Undine's bowl from behind the curtain. The Children of Cain came wriggling and crawling and bounding across the room, ignoring my commands for silence.

I set Undine's bowl back on the floor, turned to confront Thea. "Then why are you here? If you know Septimus is innocent, why aren't you back with your Tengel-Tangel friends?"

"Because it's my night off. And because people in this village aren't as smart as I am—they're not as smart as Goli. Someone's feeding them a line of lies about Septimus—and about *you, liebchen*. Darling, rumors are *rife*."

"Me? What rumors?"

"That Septimus has been kidnaping young women and murdering them for spare parts, and that you're his accomplice. They think he's creating an entire army of uber-women to take over the countryside, kill off the men, and set up a new republic of free-thinking *blau-stockings* in their place. Interesting notion," Thea added.

"I have never killed anyone," I said angrily. "It is not within me."

Thea laughed. "Not within you? How can you possibly know what is within you?"

She took my hand and roughly pushed up the sleeves of my shirt and jacket. "This," she said, pointing at the long scar that ran from my wrist to my elbow. "And this—"

She dropped my hand and yanked at my shirt collar so that the scars on my neck showed. "Look at you. You can't see yourself, Pandora, but I can, and so could anyone else with eyes. You've been living in a dream-world here with Septimus. Do you think this is the real world?"

She gestured at the unprepossessing room around us, the grimy windows and worn chaise longue.

I shrugged and ran my hand along one of the window curtains, frayed to a spiderweb of rotted crimson silk. "It seems real enough to me. We have the same trials as everyone else—we're hungry, we're cold. How are we different from the rest of them?"

"Oh, don't be a fool! This is a *sanctuary*, Pandora—a hiding place! You think they would accept you out there, a woman dressed as a man? And that's if you were able to pass as a woman! Do you think you could walk down the street unaccompanied, if they knew what you *really* are? Like Septimus's little pen—do you think they would last a day out there?"

Her finger stabbed at the window, leaving black marks on the glass. "They'd be slaughtered, and no one would call it murder."

"That would never happen! I would protect them—I'm a woman like anyone else, as much as you are. I would make sure no harm ever came to them!"

"Pandora, are you mad?" Her face white, Thea pulled an enameled mirror from her pocket, the mate of her cigarette case, opened it, and held it before my face. "Look at yourself!"

I stared at the image in the mirror: paper-white, no rouge to brighten my cheeks or lips, my eyes dark-circled though unmarked by kohl; the two ragged silver streaks in my close-cropped hair. I thought I was beautiful, and said so.

Thea stared at me in disbelief. "Beautiful?"

She brought her face beside mine. Our cheeks touched; the mirror showed two faces now, mismatched pieces of a fractured heart. Mine was like the moon, pale, untouched; hers, rosy and vivid despite the heavy makeup and marcelled hair.

"Yes, of course you're beautiful, Pandora. But *you're not really alive*," said Thea. She lay her hand upon my cheek, her warm fingers smelling faintly of tuberose. "Your skin is like ice. And look—"

She plucked at the flesh on my arm, then released it. No mark of her touch remained, no warmth or reddening to show where blood moved beneath the surface of my skin; just that same deathly bloom, tinged with violet in the crook of my elbow.

"I know what you are," she went on in a low voice. "He made you like he made them—"

She pointed at the Children of Cain, squabbling and cavorting amongst themselves like so many misshapen dolls. "Like he made Goli, like he made Henry Frankenstein's—*thing*."

She grimaced. "And—well, I know you're not exactly like it. Or them. Septimus put his heart into you. The Children of Cain, he cares for them the way he cares for Goli—the way you love a dog or cat or horse. But you—I can tell just by looking at you, he had something else in mind."

"What?" It hurt me to speak. It hurt me to hear her words—*You're not really alive—he made you like he made them*—but I knew she spoke the truth. I remembered those moments in Henry Frankenstein's tower: the touch of linen and satin against my cool skin, the light burning my eyes as they opened for the first time; the harsh voice of Frankenstein's monster crying out when it saw me.

"Thea. Tell me," I whispered. "What did he have in mind?"

"Perfection. Another woman—a real woman—there would be some flaw in the way she looked. *She* would think so, anyway,

and men would make her feel even worse. Her hips would be too big, or her breasts, or her eyes . . .

"But you—" She fixed me with that disconcertingly direct gaze. "You're almost perfect. Except for the scars, and the fact that you're dead cold to the touch. Which, let's face it, most men don't notice anyway," she added. "But otherwise, it's like you were designed by a committee. Which, considering that Henry Frankenstein helped, I guess you were."

I felt sick. I knew she was right—I had always known, and Dr. Pretorius himself had made no effort to hide my origins.

And yet to hear it spoken now, by this person—a real woman, she would call herself—frightened and enraged me.

"No." I shook my head furiously. "No! You're wrong. I'm not like *it*, I'm not like them—"

I lashed out. My arm struck Thea's shoulder. She reeled backward and gasped, "Stop! What are you—"

"I am *not* a monster," I shouted. "I'm—"

Something tugged at my leg. Without looking down, I swept it aside, heard a shrill cry then a sickening thud as it hit the wall. Thea looked around for something to use as a weapon, finding nothing, she tightened and stared at me defiantly. I raised my hand again, but stopped as a plaintive voice cried wordlessly at my feet.

I looked down. The saucer-eyed creature gazed at me imploringly. Its mouth opened to expose rows of needle teeth as it pointed to where a small form twitched, myriad limbs thrashing as it mewed in pain.

"Oh no . . ."

Stricken, I ran to it and knelt, cradling it in my arms. Its head lolled to one side as it gazed at me with huge black eyes, a triangular white tongue like a snake's darting from its mouth.

"Pandora!" I heard Dr. Pretorius's voice as the front door opened, a sudden rush of wind and rain and footsteps. The

Children of Cain scattered as Dr. Pretorius and Cesare hurried into the room. "Thea, what are you doing here?"

Dr. Pretorius looked at her, confused. Then he saw me. "Pandora! Has someone broken in? What's happened?"

I shook my head and gazed at him miserably. Tears ran down my face as I held up the injured creature so he could see. Cesare cried out in dismay.

"Thea! This is your doing!"

Thea put her hands on her hips and stared him down. "Oh please. Do you think I would touch *that*?"

"No." I stumbled to my feet. Dr. Pretorius took the serpent-faced creature from my hands, and I turned to Cesare. "It was me. I—I didn't know what I was doing. I didn't think . . . something touched me, and I hit it. I didn't even look down, just—"

The words I'd spoken just minutes ago came back to me.

I would protect them—I would make sure no harm ever came to them.

I began to weep.

"She's bloody strong, that one." Thea rubbed her arm gingerly. She glared at Cesare. "And you! You've got some nerve, accusing me of playing with your precious little monsters. What were you thinking, leaving her alone like that?"

Cesare looked shamefaced. "I'm sorry, Thea. You're right—"

"You're damn right I'm right." To my surprise, she sighed, then crossed to embrace him. "Oh, little brother, what am I going to do about you and your friends?"

"She's your sister?" I said.

Cesare kissed the top of Thea's head. "Yes. Sister, mother, father—"

"Grandmother, aunt, uncle, father confessor," Thea broke in with a sideways grin. "Not to mention spiritual advisor and, until this one came along—"

She cocked a thumb at Dr. Pretorius. "—personal physician," "Thea raised me," explained Cesare. "Our parents died in the influenza epidemic. I nearly died as well—Thea thinks that's what caused my sleeping sickness. After they were gone, she went without food herself, to make sure I got enough to eat. When we were both stronger, she took me with her to Berlin, to try and find medical care."

"I'd heard of a doctor there," said Thea. "Dr. Hirschfeld—He saved my brother . . ."

Her voice trailed off. We all turned to where Dr. Pretorius stood and tenderly held his grotesque patient, as he examined its sticklike limbs.

"Is it—will it be all right?" I asked in a small voice. Dr. Pretorius glanced up. His face was torn between concern and what I realized was fear.

"I think so," he said. "It doesn't seem to be broken. I think it was more frightened than anything else."

He looked at me and shook his head. "They trust us, Pandora. All of them—they trust us implicitly, never to harm them. You, me, Cesare . . . we are their family, their entire world."

He gazed at the homunculus in his arms. "This creature could no more imagine you hurting it, than it could imagine the sun turning black. It was my decision to give it life. So it is now my responsibility to tend to it, to keep it from harm. As it is yours as well, Pandora."

A new emotion welled in me then, compounded of grief and remorse and guilt, yes, but also anger.

"What about me?" I demanded. "You left me here alone! Thea came here to warn you that there is a murderer in the village, slaying young women. What about your responsibility to me?"

Dr. Pretorius set the creature down. It hobbled for a moment, took a few awkward steps before clawing playfully at my leg.

"You're strong enough to fend for yourself, Pandora. These creatures, they'll never be more than what they are now. But you—who knows what you will become? Who knows what you are capable of?"

The questions seemed poised between concern and a challenge. Instead of answering, I bent and stroked the monster's scaly head. It gabbled contentedly, white tongue flicking at my hand.

"Is what she said true, Thea?" Cesare asked his sister. "Is someone killing the village women?"

Thea told them what she'd told me. When she finished, Dr. Pretorius turned to Cesare.

"It's as I told you—as I feared. Henry is attempting to replicate our work with Pandora."

Cesare frowned. "How can you be sure?"

"Because he's careless, as well as murderous. Under my supervision, we made use only of the newly dead—those who perished of natural causes, in childbirth or from malnutrition."

"Insofar as those can be considered 'natural,'" Dr. Pretorius added with a grim smile. "But Henry lacks the discipline or patience to harvest cadavers. Not to mention, he lacks the social skills to cultivate those who might assist him in his labors, like the village undertaker or sexton. Now that he's married well, and seen his family fortunes restored, he won't soil his hands by using a spade to exhume the bodies he needs. No—he'd sooner slaughter young girls and butcher them while their flesh is still warm and their hearts pumping. The monster!"

Dr. Pretorius seemed oblivious to any irony in his statement, or that he pronounced the word "monster" as he absently patted a six-legged hound while several bulbous-headed monstrosities fought over a bone in the hallway.

But Thea rolled her eyes. "That may be the case. But whatever he's up to, Septimus, Henry and his Medusa of a wife are covering their bloody footprints by accusing *you*. And unless the three

of you want to end up as good-looking corpses, I suggest you all take my advice and leave town."

The room fell silent, save for the growls and squeaks of Dr. Pretorius's freakish orphans, and the ceaseless tap of rain against the windows.

"She's right, Septimus," Cesare said at last. "We can't stay here. Even if it weren't for Henry, we can barely afford to live now. Your patients can't earn enough to feed themselves, let alone feed us. And it's been a long time since payment in real cash was an option," he added with a touch of bitterness. "Now, if we'd only—"

As though he were a toy that had been dropped, Cesare crumpled to the floor. The injured homunculus began gnawing on his foot. Thea sighed, then pulled her brother onto the chaise. As she did, something crashed through the window.

"Get down!" cried Dr. Pretorius.

"Do you have an escape plan, Septimus?" she said, looking over her shoulder. Cesare gave a muffled snore. "If not, now would be a damn good time to come up with one."

"An escape plan?" Dr. Pretorius stood, his aristocratic features at odds with his frayed, once-elegant overcoat, now stained with rain and mud. "I've never believed in escape plans. I believe in trap doors."

With a sly smile, he beckoned me to him. "Come, Pandora. Thea is quite right—it's time to prepare for our departure. The first part of your education is over, my dear. Time to graduate from the provinces—

"On to Berlin!"

CHAPTER 6

Dr. Pretorius did indeed have a trap door. It was in the darkest, dankest part of his basement, a heavy, iron-bound door so overgrown with mold it gave off a dim greenish glow.

"Hold up," commanded Dr. Pretorius.

He held up his lantern and searched his pockets for a key, while the rest of us waited. It had been left to Thea and myself to gather what supplies we could, while Dr. Pretorius assembled his equipment into several large leather valises. Cesare was left to sleep.

"He won't be any use to us like that," Thea said with a shrug. "And you know it's not his fault. Better he's well-rested for when we get there."

Still, without Cesare, it was up to me to gather the Children of Cain into some vague semblance of order.

"You're bringing *them*?" Thea surveyed the straggling crowd of snapping, fretful creatures that waited for us at the top of the basement stairs. Goli sat patiently nearby, scratching at a flea with two of his hind legs. On the floor beside the dog, Dr. Pretorius had gently set the sleeping Cesare. "They'll just slow us down! And how in god's name do you expect to feed them?"

"Not in *God's* name," Dr. Pretorius retorted loftily. "I'm quite capable of providing for them in my own name, thank you very much. You'll see, Thea—they'll do a better job of providing for us than you can imagine."

"I'll believe that when I see it," Thea grumbled, and hoisted a valise in her thin arms. "All right. I'm ready. Cesare! Rise and shine!"

She nudged her brother with the toe of one high-heeled shoe. Cesare yawned and got groggily to his feet.

"Septimus?" he asked, staring blearily as Dr. Pretorius hurried down the steps. "I thought we were going to visit the abattoir this morning."

"There's been a change of plans," Dr. Pretorius's silky tones rose from the near-darkness ahead of us. "I have some business in the city that needs tending. Come along, children."

So we all followed him downstairs, Cesare and Thea, like myself, laden with heavy suitcases and burlap sacks; the Children of Cain shrieking and whooping as though on some demonic version of a Sunday School picnic; and last of all Goli, bearing in its mouth a basket that held Undine in her glass bowl.

We picked our way carefully through the debris-strewn cellar, until we reached a crumbling stone wall. At its base was the trap door, a rusted iron ring in its center.

"Pandora, here—you're the strongest," Dr. Pretorius's lantern swung back and forth as he gestured at the ground. "Open it for us, now there's a dear girl."

I bent, grabbed the ring, and tugged. The door groaned and creaked. Then, in an explosion of phosphorescent ooze and foul-smelling earth, it opened.

"Phew!" Thea pulled a handkerchief from her reticule and covered her nose. "Smells like something died in there."

"Not recently, I'm afraid," said Dr. Pretorius with regret. "This used to serve as my storeroom, in more productive times. But come along, my dears, come along—"

The passage was so low-ceilinged that we all had to stoop, save for the dog and the cavorting homunculi. In Dr. Pretorius's house I had often looked through a book that contained plates by a man named Hieronymus Bosch—Dr. Pretorius said he found it "inspiring"—and now I felt as though I'd fallen into one of those pictures. The torchlight picked out unsettling forms

in the earthen walls—mummified fingertips, the faint impression of an anguished face; yellowing bits of bones and withered hair. Livid fungi sprouted everywhere and gave off a putrid scent when trod upon. Here and there, tiny chinks in the wall let in slivers of gray light. I did my best to step carefully, and winced when unseen things broke or, once, writhed beneath my footstep.

We seemed to walk endlessly, though when Thea complained as much, Cesare said it had been less than an hour.

"You're mad," panted Thea. "Or sleepwalking. Damn! I've torn my stockings again!"

"I've been this way before," Cesare said evenly. "Not for some time, but it's not a route one forgets."

"I'd pay extra to forget it," Thea grumbled. "Damn, there goes my other heel..."

But gradually the darkness gave way to a pallid false dawn, as though we'd ventured into a world illumined solely by those glowing fungi. It was not the fungus, though, but the tunnel's end—a latticework screen of rusted metal that Septimus and Cesare tugged at until it gave way and revealed the odorous expanse of a large stable.

"Quietly now," Dr. Pretorius commanded, and slipped into the shadows.

The homunculi grew subdued, intimidated perhaps by the strange surroundings. Only Goli raced about and snuffled excitedly at the earthen floor. Thea paused to examine her ruined shoes.

"So much for being a slave to fashion." She gave a weebegone look at her torn stockings, then shrugged. "Maybe I'll start a trend—what do you think? It could catch on."

"I think if that's the worst you have to deal with, we'll be in good shape," I said, and went to look for Dr. Pretorius.

The building was expansive but seemingly abandoned, except by rats. These were as numerous as they were fearless, their

beetle-black eyes pinpointed in the torchlight as they watched us pick our way through a labyrinth of pens and storage rooms. Empty stalls held piles of moldering hay; there were piles of rusted farm machinery and cracked old leather harnesses and saddles hanging from the walls. Thea cursed as bats swept the air above our heads, landed on the rafters, and crept into cracks to sleep. Gray light seeped through chinks and openings high beneath the eaves. Red dawn, this time, I heard the distant crowing of a rooster.

"Ugh," Thea shuddered and leaned against my side. "I think I'd rather have taken my chances back there with Henry Frankenstein."

"Never." I tore a loose plank from the wall, held it up like a torch, then smashed it against a rotting door frame. The door collapsed into sawdust and mold as rats scurried for cover. "He will never rake me alive!"

Thea snorted. "That's a sure thing, seeing as you're already dead." I felt myself grow cold again with rage. Without thinking I raised my hand. The plank's shadow fell across Thea's face and her mouth tightened, but she did not run. "Pandora," she said, her voice low. She took my hand, lowered it, and pried the board from my fingers. "Listen to me! *I am not your enemy.*"

She hurled the plank into the darkness. It struck an unseen wall, and a fluttering cloud of bats scattered.

"But I *could* be your friend," she went on; "but only if you let me. And believe me, no matter what happens next, no matter where we go: once we walk outside of here—no matter where 'here' is—you're going to find a different world than the one you've been living in with my brother and Septimus and his sideshow freaks. In that world, you're going to need all the friends you can get—and by 'friends,' I mean something that roughly resembles a human being."

She shot me a crooked grin. From the shadows ahead of us echoed a high-pitched whickering, like a horse only louder, shriller, the cry of something in pain.

Thea's eyes widened. I set my hand protectively on her shoulder. "There," I said, and pointed. "It's Dr. Pretorius, and—" "And what?" Thea shivered. "That's not a— a horse. Is it?"

In the shadows, Dr. Pretorius stood just inside a stall. Above him loomed a plough-horse or Pergamon, though its sleek lines were those of a creature bred for racing. Even motionless, its muscles rippled beneath a coat that shone black as though oiled. Its great liquid eye stared at me with as much intelligence as any human eye—but it was an uncanny eye, the iris pale silver like a worn coin; and it had no pupil.

"This is Schattengeist," said Dr. Pretorius. He reached to stroke the great beast's muzzle. Its nostrils flared and it whickered, that same shrill eerie sound, its lips pulling back to reveal long black gums and the white razor teeth of a shark. "There now, my beauty, this is Pandora and Thea, more of our little family."

Beside me Thea tensed and muttered under her breath. The horse raised its head, its white teeth gnashing the air; then lowered it to nose at a battered tin tub. Blood leaked from the tub's side, and I could see something white and fleshy protruding from it, before Schattengeist caught it between its teeth and began to gnaw it ravenously.

"The crop failures have made it so difficult for farmers to feed their livestock," said Dr. Pretorius with a shake of his head. "Fortunately, Schattengeist's diet is more varied."

He turned and motioned us to follow him. "Cesare is preparing the wagon for our journey. A few finishing touches and we'll be ready to depart."

We walked with him into a larger, more open space—a barn. Wan sunlight filtered through cracks in the walls and ceiling.

The dog Goli lay watchfully by the door, with the homestead beside it in a snoring heap. In the center of the barn was a large covered wagon, a Romany caravan like those I had glimpsed sometimes, trundling through the streets outside Dr. Pretorius's house. The wagon was of wood, ornately carved with flowers and coiling vines, human faces and other, odder figures—smiling moons, stars with eyes and open mouths, cornstalks that bore serpents instead of grain. The caravan's once-bright paint peeled in tendrils of green and blue and scarlet, and most of the gilt had worn away from its window trim and door.

But it looked sturdy. And it was *big*, with wooden staves large enough to hold an ox. As Thea and I admired it, Cesare's head poked out from one of the windows.

"What do you think?" he called.

"It's beautiful," I said, and even Thea nodded.

"Watch this!" Cesare reached above the window to a long horizontal pole. He tugged on it, then began turning a small crank. A canvas awning rolled out above the window, billowed down to reveal luridly posed figures that still smelled of new paint and turpentine.

PROFESSOR FAUST'S FANTASTICAL PANOPTICON!

A panoply of splendors for old and young!

Be Amazed! Be Amused!

Highly Educational, special showings for the Ladies
Private parties welcome—highly educational

Surrounding this legend were garish images of the very figures in the barn with me now—Cesare, here shown sleeping in a sort of upright coffin; Dr. Pretorius, clad in swirling purple robes and a fakir's turban; the demonic horse Schattengeist, flames spewing from his nostrils and his hooves striking sparks; the Children of Cain, ghoulishly imprisoned in a row of bulbous glass jars.

HEAR the somnabulist share the secrets of Morpheus!
SEE dark mysteries revealed at last!
LEARN the medical lore physicians keep to themselves!

And there, in the very center of the canvas, surrounded by the macabre visions of Dr. Pretorius's retinue, my own face stared back at me.

But it was my face as though reflected in a cabaret mirror. My eyes were kohled like Thea's, my lips drawn into a crimson bow; my hair a black helmet, streaked with gleaming silver and crowning a lily-white face.

*Gaze into the eyes of Pandora,
Deadliest of beauties!*

I traced the red letters wonderingly, drew my hand back and stared at a fingertip stained as with blood.

"Careful, the paint's still wet." I looked up to see Cesare beside me. "Do you like it?"

"Is that what I am? The deadliest of beauties?"

Cesare shrugged. "That was Septimus's idea. If it sells tickets, it will be a good thing."

"But it doesn't really look like me!"

"No, it doesn't," Cesare agreed. "And you know what else? A panopticon isn't a traveling show—it's a type of prison. But it certainly sounds impressive, doesn't it?"

"I suppose." I pursed my lips in a bad imitation of the bee-stung mouth on the canvas. "But no one will believe that's my face."

"They're not supposed to. That's the point—to hide you, to hide all of us, in plain sight. A gypsy caravan, a traveling freak show—who will suspect us?"

"Everyone?" retorted Thea. She stood beside her brother and shook her head. "You might as well hand out posters saying HERE WE ARE."

Cesare looked at her sheepishly. "Septimus plans to do that, too, once we get out into the countryside."

Thea sighed. "Well, when we reach Berlin—if we reach Berlin—it will be easier to disappear. For me, anyway. And you too, Pandora, if you have the wits to come along."

"Cesare!" Dr. Pretorius called from the front of the caravan. "We need to get Schattengeist into harness! Quickly—it will be full daylight soon!"

Cesare went to assist him.

"Let's take a peek, what do you say?" said Thea, and climbed the miniature set of stairs at the back of the wagon.

Inside, the caravan was meticulous, even luxurious—gile-trimmed windows, velvet cushions on built-in seats and sofas; cunningly wrought shelves and cabinets lined with oversized apothecary bottles. Cabalistic symbols and pentagrams had been drawn on the walls and stitched into cushions; there were astrological signs painted on the ceiling, and beaded curtains dangling from the carven beams. In the front of the van, behind heavy black drapes, a set of sliding wooden doors pulled back to reveal two tiny cabins, each just large enough to contain a thick goose-down mattress piled with blankets and pillows.

"Well, there's not a lot of room here," observed Thea. "But what there is, is choice."

It was certainly far more comfortable than the quarters back at Dr. Pretorius's lair. But much more cramped, as we discovered moments later, when Goli lumbered in, trailed by the Children of Cain. The dog settled on a window seat. I had taken Undine from Goli's basket. Now I placed her carefully at

one end of the window, where she would be protected from the others but still have a good view of the world outside. Thea and I then did our best to fasten down anything that might tumble to the floor once we got moving.

And finally, with an abrupt lurch and a bone-chilling shriek from the demonic Schattengeist, the caravan rolled forward.

"We're moving!" cried Thea, and grabbed my hand. We flung ourselves at a window and peered out. Cesare and Dr. Pretorius sat in front, holding Schattengeist's reins, which were of thick leather linked through iron chains. I doubted even those heavy links could restrain the immense beast if it wanted its freedom. Vapor billowed from its nostrils as it tossed its great head and gnashed its razor teeth, as we rolled from the barn's dim interior out into the chilly dawn; and sparks flew from its hooves when they struck rocks on the muddy path.

The rain had let up; mist rose from the autumn hills, tangling with woodsmoke from distant farmsteads. The trees had burned from green to gold to brown. Wet leaves clogged the rutted byway, and the Children of Cain whooped and shrieked as we bumped across furrows and broad muddy swathes where rain had swept the road clear of gravel and stone. Behind us the towers and turfed roofs of the village faded into a gray blur of woodsmoke. Ahead of us rolled the countryside, with famine-bound farms and numberless villages that all the young people had fled—young men to the war that had claimed so many millions, young women to the cities, to try their luck at something other than backbreaking farm labor and housework, childbirth and childrearing.

Somewhere in all that patchwork of barren fields and broken castles and forests, Henry Frankenstein hunted me. The image of his twisted face flashed through my mind; the memory of his voice as he took aim with his pistol and I saw his gaze, aflame

with rage and loathing. As though he had an animal in his sights, some predatory wolf, and not another human. I ran my fingers along the scars on my neck, gingerly touched the raised ridge of bone above my temple.

You're not really alive, Thea had said. The fact that she sat companionably beside me now, a fellow-traveler in Dr. Pretorius's freak show, didn't change that.

I stared out at the passing fields and woods and shivered. Big as the world was, it suddenly didn't seem big enough.

CHAPTER 7

As the days passed, it didn't take long for us to fall into a routine. Late each afternoon, Faust's Fantastical Panopticon would roll into another village square. Or, if there was no village on the horizon, we'd find an unused field and send Thea to the nearest farmhouse. There she'd charm the landowner (and, sometimes, his wife or widow) into letting us set up for the night. Money occasionally passed hands, but Thea's flirtatious manner (and, I suspected, her flexible morals; by the end of a month she had at least a dozen new fiancés) was usually enough to get us a place to stay. Now and then the job fell to Cesare, but his abrupt plunges into sleep made this a riskier endeavor.

And Dr. Pretorius wanted to save me for the evening's show.

So the task remained Thea's. She seldom seemed to mind.

Once the wagon had stopped, Cesare would free Schattengeist from his traces and tether him to the largest tree we could find, using a length of chain that had previously moored a tugboat to a dock. The demonic horse would graze, not on grass but on squirrels and coney and any other small animal foolish enough to come within reach of its snapping jaws. When rabbits were scarce, Thea was dispatched to the farmhouse again for any scraps of meat or bone that could be spared.

It was not a bad life. We were among intelligent friends; we enjoyed much laughter, and shared what food we had. At night Thea and I would crawl into our sleeping alcove, while Dr. Pretorius and Cesare stayed long awake, smoking and drinking tumblers of gin, their laughter rocking the caravan until, sometime before dawn, their voices finally grew quiet.

But some nights Thea would be off on her own—"asking friends," as she put it, and so adding to her collection of cheap jewelry. Then I would lie alone in the small cupboard, heavily wrapped in blankets though the chill never bit at me as it did my companions. I would trace the puzzle-marks along my arms and legs and throat, scars and stitched skin, and wonder how much of what I thought and dreamed and felt truly belonged to me, the runaway bride who had named herself Pandora, and not to the poor dead girls whose limbs and skin and organs were now mine.

It was on one such night that I heard something outside the caravan. Or perhaps I only imagined that I did. The sound of something crashing through the underbrush near the caravan; something big and clumsy—

And, seemingly, in pain. It bellowed like a bull facing the slaughterhouse, so loudly I waited for Dr. Pretorius or Cesare to wake and stumble to the window.

But their snores continued unabated, a soft rumbling from the other side of the alcove wall, while the thing outside cried out again, like a belling stag.

And yet as I sat up and listened I knew that what I heard was not a brute animal's voice, but a man's. A man's voice flensed of word or meaning, of anything but blunt anguish and, yes, loneliness.

The most terrible, most solitary cry I have ever heard. I clutched the blankets to me, not for warmth but protection, as though they would hide me from whatever was out there. I don't know how long I sat there, trying not to breathe, terrified that whatever lumbered through the trees would find its way to the caravan—to me—and rip away its walls as easily as a hand tears through a spider's web.

But then its cries diminished, and the sound of underbrush crushed beneath its feet as it stumbled off. Still I would not let

myself fall asleep, not until sunlight seeped through the cracks in the walls and I heard Thea's laughter as she staggered into the caravan, demanding her breakfast.

Most of my nights, however, were as routine as my afternoon, when I'd assist Dr. Pretorius in preparation for the evening show. We'd pull down the side awning with its lurid poster—DARK MYSTERIES! DEADLIEST OF BEAUTIES!—then set up a small canvas tent outside the wagon. The canvas was verdigrised with mold and damp. But at night, with candles burning inside, it gave off a spectral green glow, as though its walls were translucent marble rather than half-rotted cloth.

In a similar fashion, everything that looked tired and worn and tawdry by daylight, at night took on an eerie glamor. Dr. Pretorius would don a set of robes, a relic from his university days, and wrap a piece of brocade curtain around his head, pinning it with a brooch. That, augmented by darkness and the clouds of smoke and sandalwood incense that accompanied each performance, was enough to make Professor Faust as real to our audience as, well, themselves.

"Haven't any of them read *Faust*?" I asked Dr. Pretorius one evening as he dressed in the back of the wagon. "Don't they know it's a book—that it's all made up?"

"Made up?" Dr. Pretorius raised an eyebrow, then adjusted the angle of his turban. "My dear Pandora, you must learn that people treasure their illusions, especially in times of need. And if their imagination is impoverished, they will treasure the illusions of others. But it is a dangerous thing, to entrust your fears and anxieties to another, especially if their scientific knowledge is spurious or non-existent."

"Then why are you doing it?"

He shrugged. "Because I have no choice. Because I like to eat. Because others depend on me for their safety and well-being. And because, every day, we are in danger—yes, even

here, in this rural backwater—and so we must sing for our supper, then move on if we are to survive.

"And also," he added with a sly smile, "because it is so enjoyable to dress up and pretend to be someone, something that one is not. Besides, what makes you think I am not Faust, hiding in plain sight?"

"Faust would have a cleaner robe," I said.

I turned to gaze at my own reflection in the cracked wedge of mirror that served as my dressing-room. I picked up a charred bit of wood and darkened my eyes—it was charcoal, not kohl, but the effect was the same. My skin was so unnaturally pale that it needed no powder. Thea had given me a silk dress, a gift from one of her admirers. Worn red silk, the bodice inset with lace, it was not a becoming color. And it was too short.

But Thea assured me that no one would notice.

"It's all the rage in Berlin these days," she said as I modeled it for her, the hem skimming my knees. "Besides, no one can afford enough fabric to make a proper dress anymore. But you need something feminine—"

She wrinkled her nose at Cesare's cast-off jacket and trousers. "That outfit might make it at the Black Cat or Cafe Monbijou or the Toppkeller. But out here?"

She wagged her finger at me. "We need all the help we can get, *schwester*. And make sure they can't see *those*—"

Her finger gently touched the scars on my throat, then pointed at another line of stitches along my thigh. "Or those. I heard someone at last night's show talking about Henry Frankenstein's wife—"

"Elizabeth?"

Thea nodded. Her daily visits to farmhouses in each new village didn't just supply us with a place to set up camp. They also gave her a chance to hear the local gossip—who had be-

trayed her husband, whose son had run off with the burgher's wife, whose child was ill with influenza.

Thea reported this news back to us. Cesare made use of it in his mind-reading performance, when, seemingly (and sometimes actually) asleep, he would call out answers to questions posed by the audience. Dr. Pretorius mined the gossip as well, referring to local scandals in a manner that, most of the time, amused onlookers. There had been a few occasions, though, when we'd had to leave town in the middle of the night after offending a farmer whose wife had strayed, or a burgher whose child bore a strong resemblance to a neighbor.

"The one and only Elizabeth Frankenstein," said Thea. "She has family in these parts, a cousin. News might not travel fast out here, but it does travel. Don't depend too much on Septimus, Pandora. His intentions are good, but . . . you know what they use for paving-stones in Hell."

So it was that fateful evening I prepared myself, as I always did, to occupy the last slot on our little performance schedule. It would be full dark when I appeared before the audience, but darkness covered what my primitive cosmetics could not.

We were camped outside a good-sized village, near the crumbling towers of an ancient castle. There had been heavy rains a week or so earlier, and the resulting crop of mushrooms had sent children and old women scurrying through the woodlands, gathering a harvest of chanterelles and blewits. Their bellies full after the long famine, the townsfolk were in good temper, and happily parted with a few pfenig for the chance to witness second-marvels in a sagging gypsy wagon. It was an unseasonably warm day—*Altweibersommer* the locals called it, Old Woman Summer, the trees still bright with a scattering of yellow leaves. Schattengeist, as always, had attracted a small crowd.

"How much you want for him?" A portly townsman stood watching Cesare as he set a tub of water before the huge horse.

"I'll give you six florins and a side of ham—good ham, you can ask anyone."

"I'm afraid we can't let him go," said Cesare with a police-magistrate's air. "We need him to pull the wagon. And he's expensive to feed!"

The man gave him a dubious look. He was tall and broad-chested, better-fed than his neighbors and marginally better dressed, in waistcoat and high leather boots. "Expensive?" That monster must live on air—I haven't seen him eat a thing since he's been here!

This last was true enough. Cesare kept the horse muzzled, and fed him only after the last customer had stumbled home. "Oh, he eats," Cesare assured him. "And with the cost of grain these days—why, he might as well be eating your good ham."

The man looked unconvinced. He drew a clay flask from his pocket, uncorked it, and took a long pull.

"My ham's too good for it. Too good for the likes of all of you."

He turned to where I stood, as I adjusted one of the tent pegs. I hadn't yet changed into my costume, and wore a tattered denims assemblage of whatever had been closest to hand when I woke—my woolen trousers, a cast-off blouse of Thea's; a ripped kimono I'd found in an old trunk inside the wagon. The man looked me up and down, then gave me a contemptuous leer.

"Table-girl." He stepped toward me and grabbed the edge of my kimono. "How much for this one, then?"

I hissed, and without thinking struck his barrel chest. The man grunted in surprise and staggered backwards. As he did, the sleeve of my kimono tore away in his hand. He flung the remnant aside, then stared at my arm, contempt freezing into shock and disgust.

"Gravelstone!"

His gaze met mine, flickered back to the network of stitches and scars that connected my hand to my wrist, ran along my arm to join another cross-stitch of flesh and catgut at my shoulder.

He spat at me, then fled, stooping to grab a stone and hurl it before he stumbled back to the village.

"Pandora! Are you all right?"

Cesare ran up beside me and grabbed my arm. It didn't hurt—I had barely felt it—and there was no mark to show where the stone had struck. Cesare ran his hand across my arm. I could see him flinch.

"It's . . . you're so cold." He looked at me and shivered. "Your skin . . ."

I turned from him angrily. "You think I'm a whore, too? A monster?"

Gravelstones—they were disfigured women, maimed by husbands or parents, or deformed by factory work and malnutrition; or simply unfortunates who had been born with their deformities. They sold themselves in the streets, to men whose tastes had grown arid through exposure to young flesh, or to fetishists who specialized in pain and decay.

Or to men who simply could not afford anything else. "Of course not!" Cesare looked stunned. "I was just . . . concerned."

But I could see something dark behind his eyes. Fear, but also incomprehension; as though he stared at some strange creature he had never seen before, something he never expected to speak. It was the first time that he had ever touched me. I had always assumed this was simply his manner, that his reticence in this extended to all women, save perhaps his sister.

I knew now that the encounter troubled him. Without another word I turned and walked back to the wagon.

Thea and Dr. Pretorius were elsewhere, preparing for the evening performance. The Children of Cain dozed along the window seats, snoring or growling or whimpering softly in their sleep. They looked like so many gargoyles, improbably fallen from their watch-stations atop a crumbling cathedral.

Yet I knew that if I were to touch any one of them, I would find its flesh warm. Even those with scales, like a fish or serpent, had blood flowing through their grotesque limbs. For several minutes I watched them sleep, wondering if Cesare's measured gaze would harden into contempt or fear if one of them were to suddenly talk to him. Then I walked to the rear of the caravan, where a small table and rudimentary shelves served as a kitchen, and picked up a knife.

Cesare kept its blade well-honed, for gutting hares or fish. I turned it in my hands, then pulled up my sleeve to reveal the inside of my arm. My skin gleamed blue-white, pale as the blade poised above it. A dark line of scar ran from shoulder to wrist, like a barbed wire embedded in the flesh. I traced this with the knife, feeling nothing; then plunged the tip of the blade into the crook of my elbow and drew it upward.

A prick of cold where steel broke skin. Flesh peeled back from an inch-long wound, like petals opening to the sun. I saw a white spur of bone, strands of muscle marbled black and gray, desiccated veins with a greenish bloom that had a faint foul odor.

But no living blood; nothing that moved or pulsed or gave off heat. I dropped the knife and probed the opening with my finger, and felt nothing. No pain, no heat or warmth, nothing but bands of muscle and sinew thick as vines, and collapsed veins like bits of dirty string. I withdrew my finger and pressed the ragged seam of skin together once more, like repairing the seal on a broken envelope.

"Gravelstone" was right. My flesh was as alive as granite. Dr. Pretorius's sleeping gargoyles were closer to humanity than I was.

"Pandora? What are you doing?"

I looked up to see Thea in the doorway, watching me.

"Nothing," I said. I let my sleeve drop to cover my arm again. "Just looking for something."
"I don't believe you." Thea strode toward me and took my hand, pulled up the sleeve to reveal where I'd cut myself. "What were you—"

She stopped. "You wanted to see if you would bleed."

I nodded as she stared at the bloodless wound.
"This is nothing," she said at last. Her expression was unreadable. "Did you want to hurt yourself? Did you think that would make you strong, or protect you somehow? Nothing you could ever do is as bad as what they will do if they capture you, Pandora. Not even death."

"I'm already dead."

"Do you really believe that?" Her eyes darkened to the deep blue of twilight. "Because I don't. I've known too many people who died, and believe me, Pandora, they don't stand around and talk to me inside a circus caravan. Not when I'm sober, anyway."

She turned, stepped to the alcove we shared, and began sorting through the frayed velvet bag that held her meager cosmetics.

"To tell you the truth," she said flatly, "I'm a lot more worried about actually being dead myself. I have a bad feeling about this town. Fraulein Geber told me that Henry Frankenstein has been in touch with some of the men here, trying to organize them into a sort of search party. They don't seem to suspect us, not yet, anyway. But even stupidity has its limits."

I watched as she applied kohl to her eyes and rouged her lips, and told her about my encounter with the man outside.

"A gravelstone, eh?" Her mouth twisted into a wry smile.
"Well, it's a living. But you're too good-looking to pass as a genuine gravelstone—as long as you keep your clothes on, anyway. Thank God it's warm tonight—I thought I'd freeze yesterday!"

She smoothed the bodice of her tasseled flapper dress and laughed. Outside it was growing dark. One by one, the Children of Cain began to wake, and the din of their growls and yelps made conversation difficult. Thea changed into her costume: a headband adorned with several wilting ostrich feathers, a sequined mask; a few filmy bits of silk that were all that remained of a negligee that had done some hard duty over the years. Using a paste of ash and green ink, she drew serpents on her arms and on her thighs, the snakes wriggling suggestively at the rolled tops of her stockings. Last of all she polished an apple, purloined from an orchard nearby, stuck a painted board fig leaf onto the front of her negligee and posed for me mockingly.

Now she was Eve, ready to introduce Pandora. I performed my own toilette, still clad in my everyday garb of trousers and waistcoat and an increasingly disreputable-looking once-white shirt. I rimmed my eyes with charcoal, then turned to get the red flapper dress that was my costume.

"Here," said Thea. "Wait—"

She removed a hat pin from her feather tiara, pricked her finger and squeezed until a red droplet welled up like a crimson tear. She touched her finger to my lips, traced an exaggerated Cupid's bow. She drew back, smiling.

"Much better. You might not cut it at the Black Cat Club, but out here in the wilderness? You're gorgeous."

Cesare opened the door and peeked inside the caravan. He seemed relieved when he saw Thea and Me together.

"A good-sized audience tonight," he said. "I don't know what you did, Thea, but it worked."

He stepped inside and began to shepherd the homunculi into their individual specimen jars. Once they had all climbed inside, he lined the jars on the windowsill beside a sign that read:

*Medical anomalies or the future of mankind?
You decide! 2 pfenig, private viewing 4 pfenig.*

Thea grimaced, pursed her lips, and blew me a kiss. "Time for the floor show. See you later, Pandora."

I pretended to busy myself with my wardrobe. As always, I would wait until the last possible moment to don my costume. Unlike Thea, I seldom felt either cold or warmth. But my flimsy chemise was far less comfortable than Cesare's cast-off clothing, and I continued to be grateful that, unlike most of the women I encountered, I could dress as I pleased.

When Cesare finished with the homunculi, he went back outside, to collect admissions from a small crowd that had already gathered. I remained in the caravan, just out of sight beside the window, and watched.

Cesare was right: it was a bigger crowd than we normally got, even in a big town like this one.

It was also a more unruly throng. There were the usual farm boys, sweet-faced and loutish by turn. But this evening they seemed to have begun their drinking well before they arrived. So did the older men, the workmen in stained coveralls, caps pulled well down over their foreheads as well as the village elders in their well-worn suits and scuffed shoes. Fewer women filled out the crowd. Those I saw were, like the men, raucous and ill-mannered, shouting back and forth to one another across the field.

And as the shadows deepened, their voices grew louder and more aggressive. Hostile, even—I heard playful gibes that held a note of genuine threat, and more than once, the sound of a bottle shattering against stone.

Still, I watched as Cesare collected pfenigs without incident, and gave his nightly spiel in front of the homunculi.

"Note the enlarged milk-teeth, also the prehensile nail and swollen forehead indicative of a latent criminal instinct..."

At one point I saw his eyelids flutter. He stumbled over a stool, his raised hand trembling as he poised between wakefulness and sudden sleep. Before he could tumble I grabbed a book from the shelf beside me and pitched it out the window. It struck Cesare's shoulder; he started, then peered past the row of bottles into the van and smiled gratefully.

I ducked back out of sight, but after a moment I drew the curtain aside once more.

The crowd seemed oblivious, all eyes fixed on the leering grotesques in their false prisons—

All save one. Toward the back of the goggle-eyed audience stood the man who'd accosted me earlier. His waistcoat was now hidden beneath the folds of a shapeless woolen coat, too heavy for the warm autumn night. His eyes were focused not on the Children of Cain or Cesare, but on the corner of the window where I stood. As I watched, he smiled—an ugly smile—then looked over his shoulder and beckoned someone in the crowd.

A figure stepped toward him, a tall man whose expensively cut suit and elegant greatcoat marked him as an interloper to the village.

But I recognized him, even as I recoiled into the shadows inside the wagon and looked around helplessly for a way out.

Henry Frankenstein.

CHAPTER 8

There was nowhere inside the caravan to hide. Every door opened onto a tiny cabinet, every curtain could be flung aside to show where we eat or slept or cooked. Outside, Cesare continued with his sing-song recitation of the homunculi's alleged powers—

"...sucks the breath from sleeping women and exhales their dreams as nightmares..."

I knew that Thea and Dr. Pretorius waited for me in the makeshift tent where our raree show was soon to begin. The tent was just a few yards away, beneath a stand of trees, but it might as well have been on the other side of the mountains. If I left the gypsy wagon, Henry Frankenstein would see me; and who knew how many of the townspeople he'd enlisted in tracking me?

Probably all of them, I thought grimly. That man I'd seen earlier—no doubt he'd alerted the entire village to our presence, as well as Henry Frankenstein.

We'd walked into a trap.

I slammed my fist against the wall and felt the wood splinter. There was no way out of the caravan; no window or door I could flee through without being seen. I was strong, but I couldn't fight an entire village. I knew that Dr. Pretorius would come to my defense, and Cesare and Thea, but to what end? Dr. Pretorius was no fighter, nor was Cesare.

And Thea, game as she might be, was too physically slight to do much damage. So were the Children of Cain. Only Schenkenstein and myself were powerful enough to hold our own, but it would be a grim battle with only one ending that I could imagine.

"So thank you, meine Damen und Herren! Now if you will all please proceed to the chamber of delights—yes, that's right, mein herr, straight inside that tent—where you'll find Doctor Faustus awaits you, with still more mysteries to be revealed..."

I glanced outside the window. The crowd had scattered, with everyone seemingly headed

for the tent. I saw no sign of Henry Frankenstein or his accomplice. In their jars in the windowsill, the homunculi clawed half-heartedly at the glass, their enormous eyes fixed on me. In her glass bowl, Undine floated like a dream of lost islands, her sea-colored hair a cloud surrounding her piquant face. She gazed at me mournfully, as though she knew all that was to come; then slowly nodded in farewell.

"Goodbye, Undine," I whispered.

As I spoke the entire wagon shuddered. The Children of Cain growled and shrielled in alarm. Water slopped from Undine's bowl as the door flew open and a shadow filled the caravan.

"That's her," announced a curt voice—Henry Frankenstein's. "Grab her and bring her to my car." He might have been ordering someone to gut a pig.

"Ja," a man behind him replied, then shouted to others outside the caravan, "Come quick! *Now*—she's here!"

I looked around for something to use as a weapon.

"Grab her arms," Henry commanded the men who now filled the far end of the caravan. "But try not to break them—I need her whole. Her body, anyway. Her face..."

He raised his head and for the first time gazed directly into my eyes.

"Ah yes, my beauty," he said in a low voice, and smiled. A *horrid* smile, cold and measuring. I thought of animals I'd seen at the farms we passed, wretched creatures with barely enough skin and muscle to bind their bones in place. I had watched as those pitiful beasts were dragged, bleating in terror, to well-worn tree stumps where one grinning lout would hold them, while another lout raised a blunted axe above the poor animal's scrawny neck.

That was how Henry Frankenstein gazed at me now: as though I were meat.

He said, "I was careless in my choices. I gave no thought to the brain I gave you—and with that pretty face. Better no mind at all. I won't make that mistake again."

I stared back at him, then bared my teeth and hissed. Frankenstein laughed.

"An angry tiger!" he said.

The other men made no move toward me. I could see rank terror in their eyes.

"Ungeheuer!" one muttered. "Monster!"

"Nein. Leiche," said the man beside him. "She's a walking corpse."

I glanced down. My sleeves had ridden up to expose the long scars along my arms, and the ragged line of stitches on my neck had a livid glow in the twilight.

"Undead," said another, his voice unsteady. "It is she we were warned of—the flesheater."

At his words they all shrunk back. Henry Frankenstein turned in anger and disgust.

"Cowards! Fools!" He slashed the air with his hand. "She's a woman! Harmless—"

I returned his gaze with loathing. Another hiss escaped my lips.

"See?" Frankenstein laughed. "Did I call her a tiger? She's nothing but a common housecat—and not even that. A stray!

A creature you'd drown or shoot if it came crawling to your door! She is *vermin*."

"*Vermin* . . . *vermin* . . ."

The men murmured and glanced at each other like so many frightened goats. But Frankenstein they regarded with renewed respect—craven animals responding to the voice of their throat to the strongest in the pack.

Thus reassured, they too began to laugh. Frankenstein took a step forward. He pointed at me with disdain.

"It's just as I told you! She's not human—she's an animal. But a vicious one. Once I have her sedated, I'll make sure she has a more tractable creature's brain. A cat's, or perhaps a monkey's. My wife Elizabeth has a pet monkey that will work very nicely, I think. Then, with a little bit of training, we'll have the ideal servant. She'll take orders without a quarrel—simple tasks at first, but she will be trained."

"Ideal servant, my eye!" one of the men broke in. "The ideal wife!"

"That's right," Frankenstein nodded, then looked at me. "Oh, yes—you'll be transformed, my dear. A mindless brute, just like your mate—"

From the windowsill came a shrilling chorus of alarm. Frankenstein turned and stared at the imprisoned homunculi. Then, with a cold smile, he picked up one of the large specimen jars. Inside it I could see Undine swimming in frantic, useless circles, her seaweed hair streaming around her.

"And what is this?" Henry crooned. "Yet another useless, witless wonder. You see the sort of thing Pretorius wastes his time on. Why, the amount of money expended on this little monstrosity could have fed a family here in the village for a month!"

He held the glass to the light and leered at it horribly.

"He's right," a man spat. "Our children eat scraps while these creatures travel in a velvet coach." The other men grumbled in assent. Then, without warning, one of them drunkenly grabbed the jar from Frankenstein's hands. The doctor stared at him in feigned surprise as the man raised the jar above his head and, with a triumphant yelp, smashed it onto the floor.

"No!"

My shout rent the air as the jar shattered. Glass and water flew everywhere. The men laughed and cheered, crowding the floor to stare down at Undine's tiny form where it thrashed and writhed in a receding puddle. Her shrill voice rose piteously, her little arms lifted to me imploringly as her tormentor's heavy boots stomped dangerously near her.

"See how easy it is to destroy an abomination?" cried Frankenstein. "Three gold marks for whoever captures the monster's bride for me!"

"I'll take care of that whore's corpse." The drunk turned away from Undine writhing at his feet. "Three marks?"

He lurched toward me. His filthy hand caught at my wrist and he looked back at his comrades, grinning. "See, Otto? I caught your sister Maria this easily, too—"

With a snarl I grabbed him. My free hand circled his throat. I felt the bones of his vertebra splinter as I crushed my fingers against his larynx until it popped like a dry reed.

The man gasped. His eyes fixed on me imploringly. I tightened my hold until they bulged and expressed no more emotion than a trout's, then threw him against the wall of the caravan. He slumped, lifeless, to the floor.

"Grab her!" Desperation clawed at Henry's voice as he pushed one of the other men forward. "Five marks!"

Before one of them could take a step, I bent and cupped my hands around Undine's tiny form, turned, and dropped her

swiftly but gently as I could into the half-filled basin by my sleeping alcove.

"I'm sorry," I murmured as she slipped beneath the surface.

"I hope Thea finds you . . ."

"Five marks?" A man pushed his way past Henry Frankenstein and bolted for the door. "Tell that to Carl there!"

"Fools!" shouted Frankenstein. "Cowards!" He grabbed a brass poker and brandished it at me. "You'll let a woman go the best of you?"

I snatched the poker from him and flung it at the man rushing for the door. It struck his head: he dropped like a felled deer.

"*Verdammt!*"

Another man broke rank and tried to flee. I lunged for his throat, lifted then hurled him into his fellows where they cowered by the window, and turned back to Frankenstein.

"You witch," he whispered.

I had thought him a coward, but I will grant him this: he stood and stared me down with as much bravado as any man has mustered in my presence. Fear and hatred clouded his eyes, but also a sort of admiration, and what might even have been twisted pride.

Because, of course, it was he as much as Pretorius who had made me what I was.

And we both knew it.

I hated him and loathed him. But for a moment I found myself, too, frozen, both of us seemingly suspended in time and space, the human and inhuman counterweights of some great machine that Henry Frankenstein had set into motion but which he no longer could control. Something flickered across his face—regret? desire? remorse?—then was gone as fleetingly as it had arrived.

"Destroy her," he said, almost to himself.

He gestured at the men beside him. There were now eight of them—nine, if I counted Henry Frankenstein—crowded into

the little caravan. Their expressions were far less complicated than their master's outright fear and repulsion.

Yet I knew that even terror has its limits as a means of checking men's violence. Repulsion can diminish it. My bloodlust in an eyeblink, and fear often heightens it. My strength was superior but not supernatural. There were nine of them, and only one of me. Already I could feel exhaustion seeping into my bones, and fear.

And Henry must have sensed this.

"Go!" he said, more roughly now. He shoved the man next to him, a hulking brute who might have been the model for Henry's own monster. A coil of thick rope dangled from his huge hand. "Bind her and bring her to my carriage! A few hours with her mate will cure this rebellion!"

The man gave a grunting laugh and came toward me. Emboldened, the others followed.

"That's right," Frankenstein smiled. "See how she becomes more docile already—"

"Now my mate," I shouted.

I struck him across the face. With a strangled cry Frankenstein lurched to one side. The men gaped, as he caught himself then yelled in a fury.

"Idiots! Take her now, before she—"

But it was too late. I bolted toward the rear of the caravan and yanked open the door of my sleeping alcove, dove inside, then pulled the door closed behind me.

From the other side of the partition came shouts of anger and dismay with Henry Frankenstein's enraged voice rising above them all.

"Fifty gold pieces for the man who takes her alive!"

I wedged myself into the corner of the little alcove, put both feet against the outer wall, and braced myself. Dr. Pretorius's words rang in my head.

I've never believed in escape plans. I believe in trap doors.
 I drew a deep breath. The wagon shook as fists pounded at the door. There was the unmistakable thud of an ax-head hitting into wood, followed by a chorus of cheers and Henry Frankenstein's triumphant cry.

"Sixty gold pieces! And ten apiece for every man of you!"
 I closed my eyes and began to push at the far wall with my feet. The partition behind me shook as though it were alive. I ignored it, grunting with the effort to push harder and harder still, until I felt the wood beneath my feet start to give way. I drew one last deep breath, drew my legs back, then with all my strength kicked.

With a dull crack the wall in front of me split. I pulled myself forward, clawing at splintered wood until I crawled through the opening and half-jumped, half-fell to the ground.

Inside the caravan behind me, Frankenstein's men continued to chop and bash at the alcove. I stumbled to my feet, struggling to catch my breath, and peered around the corner of the wagon.

Two men stood outside the gypsy van's door, holding lanterns and striving to see what was happening inside. As the flickering lamplight washed across their faces, I could see that they were intoxicated: red-cheeked, bleary-eyed, grabbing at each other in a feeble attempt to remain upright.

"Sounds like a bit of a party in there," said one with a leer.

His companion nodded. "Why should they have all the fun?"

They began to paw clumsily at the door. I kept to the shadows and watched them, trying to figure out my best chance for escape.

I could outrun them with little effort. They were drunk, and flabby to boot. I could probably out-fight them, too—but only until Henry Frankenstein and his rabble heard the ruckus and gave chase.

I was sorely outnumbered. I turned silently and looked at the tent.

"You've heard of the Seven Wonders of the World? Now view the eighth—the Somaambulists! He walks through the country—not with the waving wand, and hears those questions you dare not ask the waking world."

Inside the canvas walls, only a few lamps were lit. From where I stood, it was as though I gazed upon a life-sized shadow-theater. The silhouettes of the audience were massed against the lower part of the tent. Dr. Pretorius's tall, spare shadow seemed to rise and fall above them, like a djinn in the Arabian Nights that can grow large as an elephant then shrink to a goat's size.

"And now, he will answer them! Who among you will be the first to voice his most secret wishes? Who is not afraid to know what lies within the night country?"

Despite the danger, I found myself holding my breath as I waited for the first hesitant voice to call out. I knew that Thea was somewhere in that audience, her face hidden within a shawl's folds: if no one spoke, she would.

Her feigned questions were seldom necessary. And indeed, after a brief silence a woman piped up.

"What are the thirty-nine steps?"

Before Cesare could reply, I heard an ominous sound from the caravan—the creak and muffled crash of wood giving way, followed by excited voices. Frankenstein's minions had breached the van's wall.

Swiftly as I could, I retreated deeper into the darkness beneath the trees. A short distance away Schattengeist whickered. If I could reach him without being seen, I still might make my escape.

I had never ridden a horse. I had no idea if Dr. Pretorius's demonic steed would carry me, or (as seemed equally likely) kill me. And the thought of leaving my friends—my family—filled me with such grief that I bowed my head, fighting tears.

But I had no choice. If I stayed, I would be captured, my friends killed if they came to my defense. If I left now, Frankenstein would certainly pursue me, and Doctor Faustus's Panopticon might be forgotten in the uproar. I cast a longing farewell look upon the shadows of those I loved most, turned, and crept toward Schattengeist.

"Here—I see her, Dr. Frankenstein!"

An excited cry echoed through the still night, followed by others.

"Behind the tent! Quick!"

Figures fell from the caravan like beetles fleeing an overturned stone. Some of them tumbled through the opening in the rear of the van. The rest tore down the steps, whooping in drunken exultation. Last of all appeared Henry Frankenstein. He was attended by the man I'd encountered earlier, and by another, burlier man who towered above them.

"Grab her, Henrik," Frankenstein commanded. "But remember—I don't want her harmed."

Branches whipped against my face as I ran toward Schattengeist, tripping on loose stones and clods. Behind me came more excited cries, as querulous voices joined in from the audience inside the tent.

"Remain calm!" Dr. Pretorius's stentorian tones echoed through the night. "This too the Somnambulist has seen—"

"Fat chance of *that*," said a breathless voice just behind me.

I looked back to see Thea duck as a rock went sailing past her head.

"Thea!" I gasped. A few yards away, Schattengeist's whicker became a warning shriek. "Don't—you'll—"

"I'll what? Lose a promising career as a tent-show queen?"

Another stone struck near her feet and Thea stumbled. I caught her, and we ran hand in hand to where Schattengeist tossed his great head, razor teeth gleaming in the torchlight.

Thea shot me a grim look. "You're a popular girl, Pandora—this is a better turnout than we had inside."

Before us stood a dozen men brandishing torches and staves. One held a scythe, another a musket so ancient I doubted it could still hold its powder. But there were twelve of them and only two of us, although I could hear Dr. Pretorius and Cesare shouting our names from the melee that had erupted in the tent.

"Pandora! Thea! Where are you?"

A man stepped toward us, leering at Thea in her disheveled head-dress and beaded costume.

"I'll take this one," he said, and lunged for her. Thea darted to one side as I swung my arm and struck him squarely in the head.

There was a distinct *crack*. The man stared at me, eyes wide. Then his head lolled to one side and he toppled to the ground, the torch spilling from his hand.

Silence as the other men stared at their fallen comrade.

"Murderer!" one of them shouted.

"She's killed Odolf?"

"Get her!"

They surged toward us. I grabbed the torch from the ground and brandished it like a club. Another man took a swing at me with a club. I kicked at him and he went sprawling. Thea darted forward and snatched the club from his hand, then began striking wildly at anyone in sight.

"You want to join him?" she screamed, and kicked Odolf's body. "Who's next in line? You? You?"

The injured man groaned and rolled onto his side, struggling to get up. With both hands, Thea raised her cudgel then brought it down on his shoulder. He groaned and dropped back to the ground, then was still.

The men weren't expecting this. They drew back into a circle, obviously unnerved as Thea, wild-eyed and breathing hard, stood with her feet planted to either side of the prone form.

"Come on, *mein herren*," she yelled. "You would have paid to see me inside! This show's for *free*—"

"Thea! Cesare's desperate voice rose above the din. "We're coming, just hold on!"

I glanced back and saw another crowd behind us, milling in front of the tent. Women, mostly, and a few older men and young children. They regarded us with puzzled faces, unsure whether or not this was part of the act.

But at least one person knew the truth.

"Out of my way! What nonsense is this!"

Dr. Pretorius pushed his way through the crowd until he reached the front. When he saw me he blanched, but quickly drew himself up. He shoved aside an elderly woman and strode into the circle of torchlight.

"Witness Pandora!" he cried, and swept his arm out to indicate me. "The future of Womankind! Beautiful as a mountain stream, strong as the mountain!"

The audience murmured approvingly. Thea looked over her shoulder at Dr. Pretorius, then at me.

"What's he *doing*?" she hissed.

"Merely a minor domestic disturbance," Dr. Pretorius went on in his silken tone. "Why, these lovely associates fought off thrice as many men just last night!"

"Wish she'd taken care of *my* husband!" a woman in the crowd called out as the rest laughed.

"And mine!" cried another.

"My father use to beat me with a stick like that," a third announced. "Wish he was still alive—I'd have her kill him for me!"

"Pandora!" A slight fair-haired woman broke from the crowd to stand in the guttering torchlight. "My Kurt, he's right there—"

She pointed at the man with the scythe. "He's fathered three brats with a slut in the next town over, but does he have time for his own wife and children?"

As the other women nodded and laughed in agreement, she swooped, picked up a stone, and lobbed it at her husband. Before he could duck—from his confused look, he was either drunk or flabbergasted or both—the rock hit him squarely in the chest. With a grunt he doubled over, cursing. The scythe fell from his hand. Quick as a snake one of the other women ran out and grabbed it.

"Yes?" she yelled angrily. She stared down the men as she stood above the still-groaning Kurt, and held the scythe with practiced ease. "Well, that slut's my sister, and she hasn't seen him for a month. But I can name two other men here who've been forcing themselves on her against her will!"

"Septimus!" Cesare ran up breathlessly beside Dr. Pretorius. "Where are Pandora and—"

He stopped, and stared at me in disbelief. Dr. Pretorius allowed himself a small smile.

"Well, Cesare, it doesn't seem as though they needed a somnambulist to unearth their secrets," he said, *sotto voce*.

"A hundred gold pieces to the man who takes her alive!" Henry Frankenstein's frantic voice echoed across the night. He pushed his way through the crowd until he stood opposite me, his face red with fury. "You imbeciles!"

"Why don't *you* take her?" a woman shouted amid ribald laughter. "She looks like more woman than you can handle!"

Another stone hurtled through the air, followed by another, and another. Henry Frankenstein dodged the missiles, but one struck the man beside him, who swore angrily.

"They've gone mad!" He ducked as a second volley of rocks headed toward him. The other men in the circle looked increasingly uneasy and backed away from us.

"Two hundred gold pieces!" Frankenstein's voice took on the pleading desperation of an auctioneer selling damaged goods. "For god's sake, she's just a woman!"

Kurt staggered to his feet, aided by one of his friends. He stared at me and shook his head.

"I don't know what she is," he said. "But if she's a woman, I'm for the monastery."

And he turned and ran, stumbling, into the darkness. Then he gave me a quick look.

"I know about audiences," she said in a low voice. "And this one's about to turn. Start moving."

She gestured to where Schattengeist was chained, kept her eyes on the circle of torches, and began to inch closer to the shadows. I did the same, glancing over my shoulder at Cesare and Dr. Pretorius.

Their faces were grave; but then Dr. Pretorius lifted his head and gazed back at me. Almost imperceptibly he nodded. His brow furrowed, his eyes were immeasurably sad as he stared at me; then winked.

He was saying farewell.

I felt the breath catch in my throat and an unaccustomed pricking at my own eyes. I blinked, started to take a step toward him when he shook his head and, grasping Cesare by the shoulder, stepped into the torchlight.

"I see that the notorious Henry Frankenstein has deigned to pay a visit to this charming village! And he has offered employment, of sorts, to the menfolk—offering them work as vigilantes. How very charming. And based on what I've heard these women say, I have *no doubt* but that their husbands intend to turn every pfenig over to their hausfraus, rather than spend their earnings on beer or loose women or gambling or . . ."

"Pandora, come on!" Thea whispered urgently. "He's giving us a way out—"

" . . . because, as you all well know, despite the various scandals he was so recently embroiled in, the *exceedingly wealthy* and

generous Dr. Frankenstein is no stranger to the mysteries of science and . . ."

Thea was right. For a few precious minutes, Dr. Pretorius controlled the crowd. He gestured dramatically from Henry Frankenstein to the restless onlookers, who craned to see this rich visitor who had inexplicably dropped into their midst. I was momentarily forgotten—but not by Thea.

"Pandora!" She smacked my arm. "Don't be a rube! It's a trick, a spiel. They're supposed to fall for it, not us."

I crept along beside her until we reached the edge of the crowd. Abruptly Thea turned and sprinted off, heading for Schattengeist. I followed.

And still no one seemed to notice our escape. Dr. Pretorius's seductive voice drifted toward us above the murmurings of the crowd and Henry Frankenstein's furious but ineffectual protests.

"Damn it, get away from me! I have no money for you, not until she's captured—by God, if you touch me again, I'll—"

Thea halted, panting. She pointed to the horse, now just a few feet from us. Gnawed bones were scattered across the blackened turf, which had been gouged and churned to mud by his restless stamping. "Can you break his chain?"

The horse pawed furiously at the ground as I approached. He still bore a saddle—neither Cesare nor Dr. Pretorius had been able to remove it since we left the stable. His red eyes rolled madly and his black lips curled back from his teeth as I grabbed the iron links, trying to avoid his flailing hooves.

"Schattengeist," I whispered. "Stop, you idiot—I'm trying to set you free."

But the horse was as evil-tempered as he was evil-looking. Twice he caught me a glancing blow, before I got a firm hold on the chain and tugged at it. The iron bolt Cesare had buried in the ground creaked and twisted and finally gave way. I

dropped the chain, as Schattengeist reared onto his hind legs, whickering gleefully. As his front hooves slammed back down onto the earth I grasped his bridle, a torturous array of leather and iron and metal spikes, then twisted it until the horse shrieked—not in pain but fury at being held. Thea watched, and for once was silent.

But Schattengeist's enraged scream had turned the crowd's attention to us again.

"There she is!" shouted Henry Frankenstein. "Now, before she can escape—fire at her!"

"Get on!" I commanded Thea. She cringed as the horse once more reared. I yanked with all my might until the chain brought the horse crashing back onto all fours. "Now—"

Thea grabbed a hank of Schattengeist's mane and swung herself up and onto the saddle. She held a hand out to me as I clambered on behind her, wrapping the chain around my arm in lieu of reins, and kicked my heels against his flanks as I had seen other riders do with more earthly horses.

But Schattengeist needed no encouragement. His head rolled wildly as he screamed again, this time in excitement. Thea held on for dear life, and I held on to her as the horse leapt forward, sparks flying where his hooves struck the stony earth.

"Where are we going?" cried Thea.

The wind ripped my reply from me. "Away—"

I clung to her and looked back. Like manikins in a toy theater, the figures of Cesare and Dr. Pretorius and Henry Frankenstein and all the others grew smaller and smaller, ringed in a circle of torches like the footlights on a stage. Their voices ebbed, the torches winked and wavered as Schattengeist plunged on, until at last the forest rose to meet us and Professor Faust's Panopticon disappeared, swallowed by the night.

CHAPTER 9

I don't know exactly how long we rode. Hours and hours, a wind-racked dream of lashing branches and flying leaves, Schattengeist's eerie screams, and the rustling of hidden creatures in the surrounding darkness. The evening's unaccustomed warmth vanished into a cold wind from the north. Thea fell asleep, face pressed against the horse's rough mane. I remained wakeful, careful lest she fall and also alert to anyone who might have followed us.

But we seemed to have made a clean escape. I saw no one, nothing save endless miles of forest and a distant ridge of mountains. It was just as well that I had no idea where we were going and no inkling as to which direction we would find Berlin: Schattengeist ran like a beast possessed. My feeble efforts to control him—rugging on the chain attached to his heavy bridle, kicking my feet against his sides—were ignored.

And once, when I yanked too hard at the bridle, he turned his head to snap at me, teeth clashing like daggers against the iron bit in his mouth and his ember eyes glittering. With a strangled snarl, he wrenched his mouth open, wider and wider, until I heard a grinding noise. Like a rusted lock giving way, the iron bit sprang open and fell in pieces to the ground. Schattengeist tossed his head, and the woods echoed with his gleeful scream as his hooves pounded the shattered bit into the leaf mold.

Otherwise he ran tirelessly and all but silently. Heat radiated from his body as from a stove. A faint smell of burning followed us, as sparks flew from his hooves to smolder in drifts of fallen

leaves. I wondered with growing trepidation how we'd find him when—if—he grew too tired to run any farther.

Only when dawn broke did Schattengeist finally slow to a canter. His breath clouded the chilly air as he picked his way along a riverbank, stopping now and then to drink. Oaks dropped golden leaves that moved lazily with the slow-moving current. Fish broke the surface to feed on gnats and a few late autumn moths. When Schattengeist drew too near to them, a flock of wild geese lifted into the air with panicked cries, and once I saw a large black shadow—a wolf—melt into the trees at our approach. Otherwise all was still and gray and cold.

"Where are we?" Thea lifted her head bleakly and unclenched her hands from Schattengeist's mane. She pulled at the long hairs caught between her fingers, stiff and coiled as wire.

"Ugh. Is it morning?"

"I hope so. And I don't know where we are. Closer to Berlin than we were yesterday, if we're lucky."

Thea cast a dubious look at our surroundings. "Closer to nowhere, if you ask me."

She grimaced as Schattengeist snorted and stepped into the river. Water swirled around his legs as he waded deeper, then began to swim toward the other shore.

"Can't you stop him?" demanded Thea.

"You think he obeys my commands?" I asked incredulously.

"Are you mad? Just hang on, and we'll hope the city is that way—"

I had let go of the chain hours before. All night it dangled uselessly beside me, knocking against my legs. Now I grabbed it and clung to it tightly as I could, as the horse forded the river then headed into the shallows lapping at the far shore.

It was as isolated here as on the opposite bank. Wind stirred the branches of the firs. Geese fed in the yellowing reeds. With surprising stealth and no more sound than a

falling leaf, Schattengeist stepped toward them, head low, ears flattened against his neck. The geese chuckled and preened, oblivious to the black form looming above them. Then, swift as a sprung trap, Schattengeist's hoof lashed out. Geese fled squawking into the air in a frenzy of feathers and frigid water—all save one. It floated on the surface, neatly decapitated, wings spread as a film of red pooled across the water.

Schattengeist dipped his head and crunched the dead bird between his jaws. With much noisy chewing and cracking of bones he ate it, feathers and all, then nosed fruitlessly in the shallows for more. Water boiled and steamed around his muzzle. Thea shuddered.

"Do you think that will keep him for long?" She knotted her fingers in his mane again and looked at me uneasily. "I won't even mention I'm getting hungry myself. Or that I'm not really dressed for a wilderness excursion, or—"

The horse stepped nimbly onto the shore. A few yards from the rocky shingle, black-edged fir trees grew in an unbroken line as far as the eye could see. Above their ragged tips a pale autumn sun was rising, sheathed in streamers of yolk-colored mist. Ravens hopped from branch to branch, clacking as they watched us with avid black eyes. Droplets flew in a bright arc. Schattengeist shook his head. The ravens croaked and lifted from the firs, as the horse raised his muzzle to the sky and gave a weird yodeling cry, like a belling stag.

The sound echoed from the trees. I could see Thea's cheeks pale as she gazed into the black firs.

"This is a bad place, Pandora," she said in a low voice. "Wurzelwicht live here. I know it. I know it . . ."

"What are Wurzelwicht?"

"Evil things." Schattengeist picked his way among the rocks, pausing to graze on a tangled mass of black feathers

and fly-ridden bone. "My grandmother told me about them, even in Berlin they know of such things and warn you never to anger one."

"I have never heard of them."

Thea made a muffled sound that in happier days might have been suppressed laughter. "I'm shocked. What have you heard of, Pandora?"

"It's a superstition," I retorted. "Nothing lives here except for crows and blowflies."

"Oh yes? Then who left that?" She pointed to a large fire pit, a circle of great boulders with a small desert of cold ash and charred logs in its center. "Because that is not a flock of crows I'd like to run into."

Schattengeist seemed to agree: he drew up, nostrils flaring, and pawed the ground. Another bird called from the shadows of the trees, a high-pitched whistling like a rock coney's cry. Another whistle came from further down the shore, and then another.

"That's no bird." Thea's hands tightened on Schattengeist's mane. "Pandora, we should go *now*—"

"Too late," I said.

From the woods stepped a dozen figures dressed like renegades from some mad children's book: hair braided with feathers and leather plaits, heads crowned with peaked Tyrolian hats or newsboys' caps. They wore leather boots and filthy trousers, their shirts patched with whatever the woods offered—birch bark, leaves, dried ferns, the pelts of squirrels and foxes. Some had elaborate tattoos on their cheeks and forearms, sunbursts and flaming arrows, arcane symbols and stylized animals: bears, wolves, eagles, elk. They all wore gaudy jewelry—earrings, bracelets, necklaces of glass beads strung with bones and carved bits of wood. One had a torn woman's dress over his trousers; a railroad spike pierced his bare chest, the flesh around it tan and puckered as old leather. Even from a few yards away I could

smell them, a rank animal scent of uncured skins and spoiled meat, woodsmoke and sweat and semen.

All carried weapons: daggers, bows, and arrows; a spear fashioned from a rusted hoe, a scythe hammered into a sword. The youngest was no more than thirteen or fourteen, the oldest not yet twenty. The tallest, their leader, bore a snub-nosed pistol that he handled as casually as though it were a slingshot.

Thea swore under her breath. "Now we're in for it. These are Wild-boys."

"What are Wild-boys?"

"Runaways, you see them living on the verges of Berlin. Their families can't afford to feed them, so they strike off on their own and form tribes. They live in burned-out buildings, or by the garbage dumps. Sometimes they make forays out into the countryside, but I've never heard of them living as far out in the woods as this. They're vicious—they'll kill you in your sleep for your shoes. If you don't have shoes, they'll kill you for being barefoot."

"*Guten morgen, mein Damen*," a clear voice called in greeting. The leader swaggered toward us. I pegged him as about seventeen, lanky and burned golden by the sun, his dark hair braided with a string of pearls. He wore a woman's kid gloves with the fingers snipped off, and a peaked Tyrolian cap whose frayed ribbon held a grisly array of feathers, squirrel-tails, and bones; a formal morning coat cut into a ragged fringe; mismatched boots, both left feet; dangling earrings and a score of gold wedding bands on his fingers. Around his neck he wore a dirty piece of twine that bore an odd-looking, handmade sigil of bone and wood—a rayed sun surmounted by a crescent moon. Where moon and sun overlapped, someone had carved an eye and painted its pupil blood-red.

The boy cocked his pistol at me. "I said, 'Good morning.'" His eyes were a startling pale blue, in a face that still bore the round cheeks and rosy coloring of a young boy.

"I haven't yet been to sleep," I retorted. Beside me I felt Thea tense. Her hand grabbed mine, icy cold. "And we were expecting company."

"I bet you weren't," the boy said. The others laughed and made rude remarks, until he gave them a sharp glance and they fell silent. "This is Wendigo country. No one comes here and lives."

I gave him a cold look. "Wendigo? I never heard of it." A boy snickered, while another made the same high-pitched whistle we'd first heard before they appeared.

"I'm Wendigo." The leader stared at me through narrowed eyes. With his free hand he reflexively touched the sigil at his throat. "This is my tribe, named for me. This is my country, named for me. Everything here belongs to me. Do you know why?"

He swept his arm out and aimed his gun across the water, closed his eyes and fired. Ravens rose in a frantic rush of black from one of the firs. A single bird dropped to the shingle and splashed into the shallows.

As though he'd done something as casual as swatting a fly, the boy turned back to us.

"Why?" he repeated, though neither Thea nor myself had uttered a word. "Because I am Wendigo. And I'm the strongest."

He looked me up and down. He gave a more disdainful glance at Thea before cocking his head to stare at our mount appraisingly. The boy then circled us slowly, keeping a safe distance as he examined Schattengeist through those intent pale eyes.

At last he stopped, and looked up at me again. "Where'd you steal the horse?"

"We did not—" I began, when Thea broke in.

"It belonged to the head burgher of Klout. He came to me in my bed and I slit his throat. Just like this—"

she leaned from Schattengeist's back and raked the air with her dagger fingernails. The horse whickered and pawed at the stony ground, then stared at the Wild-boys with baleful eyes, as though daring them to touch us. The Wild-boys cursed and laughed admiringly.

"Klout? Never heard of it." Wendigo turned to prod the boy beside him with the nose of his pistol. "Foxblood—bring that horse to me."

The boy had a fringe of red hair and broken front teeth filed to ragged points. He spat, then shot Wendigo a dubious look. "It'll kill me," he said flatly.

Wendigo smiled. "Fine. Your choice."

He shut his eyes again and pointed the gun at Foxblood. The red-haired boy turned and stared at me with loathing. He drew a long-bladed kitchen knife from his belt, took a cautious step toward Schattengeist. With a deafening shriek, the horse reared, hooves lashing the air as the boy ducked and fled into the shallows.

"Foxblood!" Wendigo yelled after him. "Wrong way!"

The other Wild-boys whooped with raucous pleasure as the red-haired boy waded downstream, icy water rushing past his knees.

"Damn you for a coward, Wendigo!" he shouted in a rage. "Get your own demon horse!"

Schattengeist snorted, black lips drawing back from his teeth. Everyone abruptly grew quiet.

"We haven't slept all night," I said. "We're trying to get to Berlin. You can see we have nothing of any value."

"Except for Satan's own mount," a boy muttered.

I looked at Wendigo. He stared back at me fearlessly, and then his eyes widened.

"Leiche!" he murmured.

Too late I realized that my shirt-collar had slid to one side, exposing the livid scars on my neck. His gaze flicked to my

hands, the faint zigzag of more scars there and the darker web of stitches on my arms. For a long time he stared at me, twisting the gun in his fingers. His mouth grew tight, his eyes seemed to darken. Once again he touched the linked moon and said at his throat. At last he looked away.

"Come and eat with us," he said brusquely.

"What?" One of the Wild-boys protested. "They're women, for god's sake—"

Wendigo's arm shot out and caught him a clout on the side of the head. The boy staggered then fell to his knees, moaning as blood seeped from his ear. Without another word, Wendigo spun on his heel and strode into the woods.

"Nicely done," said Thea. I wasn't sure if she referred to the Wild-boy's leader or me. Or maybe to herself. "I hope their cooking is better than their wardrobe."

"I hope it's as good as Wendigo's aim."

We followed them into the trees. Bracken and fallen branches snapped beneath Schattengeist's heavy tread. I glanced back and saw a sodden Foxblood bringing up the rear. He lifted his head and glared with bloodshot eyes, then mouthed an obscenity. I bared my teeth at him and hissed. One of the other boys looked up at me and laughed, his expression mingling amusement and admiration.

"You run off from the circus?" he asked.

"Close enough."

"I've never seen a horse like that." He eyed Schattengeist, and admiration gave way to downright covetousness. "I'd have stolen him, too, if I'd seen him first."

"You would have been lucky to walk away alive," said Thea. She tossed her head coquettishly, unconcerned that her bobbed hair was nearly as tangled as the horse's mane. "Schattengeist won't let anyone touch him save Pandora and myself."

"Schattengeist." The boy savored the name with a nod. "Shadow-ghost." A good name for him. And Pandora—
He tipped his bone-bedecked hat to me with an ironic bow. "Nice of you to drop by. It's been a long time since we've seen any women." He elbowed the boy next to him. "Right?"
The boy spat. "Breeding stock," he said contemptuously. "Who needs them?"

"But you can't live without them when you're hungry," Thea sniffed. "And once night falls."

The boy hooted in disdain. "If you can't live without women, you don't belong with us! As for hunger—"

He grinned, displaying lips and gums tattooed with black spiders. "—we're not afraid of hunting live meat."

Thea glanced uneasily at me. "It's true. Wild-boys—they have no use for women. Which means we're not going to have much bargaining power with them. But that's not the worst of it."

Her voice dropped to a whisper. "It's not a joke, what he says about hunting live meat. Last spring several people disappeared from a houseboat on the Spree. They later found them—what was left of them—in the Oberstwald, where another tribe had an entire village of tents and treehouses."

I shifted, Schattengeist's mane taut between my fingers. "We could ride off now," I said. "We're mounted, they're on foot..."

"And armed with guns. One gun, anyway." Thea looked to where Wendigo kept pace with us a few feet off. "Schattengeist might be a moving target, but he's a big one. Then there's us sitting up here like wooden ducks at the shooting range. I'm not afraid of dying, but I'm not in any rush. Especially if it means being served as dinner to a bunch of street ruffians."

"Forest ruffians," I corrected her. "But it's a good point."

Ahead of us the trees began to thin. Yellowing ferns grew between leafless birch and beech. A faint cold smell of ash and

old woodsmoke hung in the air, though I saw no fire burning. Schattengeist's nostrils flared; his lips curled as he whickered in alarm.

"Dear God," whispered Thea. "Look at that."

Like malign scarecrows, skeletal figures were set in a rough circle around a clearing. Animal skulls propped atop saplings stripped of branches, with bones and feathers woven or nailed around them in a disturbing array that was obviously meant to suggest human forms. Skulls, femurs, legs, ribs, wings and dead blowflies. But, as far as I could tell, there were no actual human remains.

Which didn't make the sight any less ghastly. You might think that, after living with Dr. Pretorius's homunculi, I should have been inured to such perversions of creation. But there was something uncanny about the scarecrows, a childish quality that made them seem all the more frightening—as though given nothing but horror and blood and death, a group of untended children would still play at houses and dolls and soldiers.

And, seeing the Wild-boys running ahead of us, mock-fighting and shouting in their treble voices (only Wendigo and one or two others were old enough to speak in a man's tones) I realized that this was true. The Wild-boys were throwaway children, as the homunculi were throwaway experiments, and I a throwaway woman. They lived on the verges—but they were alive, in a country where so many had died from starvation or disease or war. The skeletal figures were a warning, but they were also a celebration.

And indeed, as we passed them, the Wild-boys greeted the scarecrows by name, slapping at them fondly or stopping to tuck a feather into an empty eye-socket, or adjust a grinning jawbone where it dangled ghoulishly above a small pyramid composed of the skulls of birds.

"This is our domain," Wendigo ran up alongside us, and Schattengeist edged away nervously. "No one enters without our permission. But you—"
"—are welcome."

"Thanks," said Thea. She wrinkled her nose in distaste. A makeshift sign leaned against the base of a tree, a weathered gray wagon-board with letters formed of more bones, spelling out WENDIGO.

"What's that mean, anyway? Your name, your tribe's name?"
"It's from a book," a voice piped up. "He used to be Oskar, before—"

A slight boy went sprawling as someone smacked him. Wendigo turned angrily. "Leave him alone! Get up, Zane—"

The small boy scrambled to his feet. Wendigo grabbed him by the hair and yanked him to his side. "This is Zane. His name's from a book, too. That's Manitou, and that's Spider, and Derek Deadeye . . ."

As he named them we came to the center of the clearing. A half-dozen makeshift tents stood between a few spindly trees, made of filthy, much-patched bits of sailcloth that still bore remnants of rigging. I recognized the architectural style from a book I had read at Dr. Pretorius's house.

"These are tipis?" I said, and dismounted.

"Yes," said Wendigo proudly. "In Berlin, all Wild-boys want to live like the mighty Red Men. But we are the only ones who truly do so."

"The tipis are from a book, too," said Zane. "Like my name. See?"
He thrust a battered volume at me. Gilt letters on faded cloth:

DER MANN AUS DEM WALDE
ZANE GRAY.

This too I recognized from Dr. Pretorius's library, a writer whose books Cesare devoured, but which Dr. Pretorius held

in low esteem. I turned the book over in my hands, rifled the pages, then handed it back to Zane.

"His name—" Zane cocked his head at Wendigo. "It's from a different book. A book of monsters. But our tribe took the name, because he's our leader."

The boy grinned proudly. Wendigo looked embarrassed but pleased.

"Tie your horse there," he said, and pointed to a large oak.

"Then come join me in my tent."

He yelled at some of the boys to help us, then headed for the least ramshackle-looking assemblage of canvas and sticks and ducked inside. But a second later his head popped out again.

"Just you," he said, his icy eyes fixed on me. "Your friend will have to wait."

Thea began to protest until I grabbed her hand.

"Don't be an idiot," I said, once Wendigo had disappeared again. I began to chain Schattengeist to the tree. "It would be much riskier for us both to be in there—this way you can keep an eye on things, make sure I don't get ambushed. And see if you can find something for him to eat, and some water, too."

I ran my hand across Schattengeist's flank. The horse snorted, and a tendril of flame singed a sere leaf into ash. Thea grimaced but nodded reluctantly.

"Fine. That's if these little bastards have ever *heard* of clean water."

She ran a hand across her once-sleek bob and flicked mud from the heel of her shoe. With a toss of her head, she minced across the clearing to where the Wild-boys stood around a fire. I watched her until she sidled up to the tallest of them. He barely came up to her shoulder.

"So," she said. "Is it true what they say about Wild-boys?"

The boys looked at each other nervously.

"Uh, what do you mean?" one asked.

"You know," Thea cocked her head and smiled, reaching down to tousle his hair. "That they're, you know—wild?"

I rolled my eyes and went to find Wendigo. Bleak light filtered through the tent's stained canvas walls, giving everything a grimy twilight cast; an unfriendly urban light that seemed at odds with Wendigo's sad efforts to make the place look rustic and, presumably, suitable for a visiting red Indian. There was a chair made from sticks and leather shreds, a small heap of moldering blankets; some more books by Zane Gray, and several by a man named Algernon Blackwood. There were also American magazines with brightly-colored covers. These were tossed into a twig basket that held bones, some still striped with dried flesh. Wendigo flopped onto the floor and began to gnaw on one of these as though it were a carrot.

"Help yourself," he said, and held out the basket. "Please."

"No thank you. I just ate."

Wendigo grimaced. "Wish I had."

As if on cue, his stomach grumbled. "Game's been scarce the last few weeks," he explained. "Winters' coming on. And as you can see, I have a lot of mouths to feed."

"You're all runaways?"

He nodded. "Most of us. Some are orphans. Some of us *wish* we were orphans. Times are rough out here in the countryside. Not as rough as in the city, in some ways. Worse, in others. But I gather you've figured that out for yourself," he added with a wry smile. "You and your girlfriend—you're going to Berlin?"

I hesitated. This boy seemed bloodthirsty enough—he was already chewing on a second bone—and his enthusiastic adoption of the writings of a man whom Dr. Pretorius disdained made me wonder if Wendigo had ever improved his

mind with the likes of Goethe or Hoffmann. It seemed strange to me that a group of Berliners, even such young ones, would so readily immerse themselves into a world of imaginary red Indians and, if I was to judge from the magazine covers beside me, tentacled women and men made out of metal.

I recalled the horror and fear with which the village men had regarded me the night before, and wondered how it was that these boys—this boy, anyway—didn't cringe or run at the sight of me. Or of Schattengeist, for that matter.

I picked up one of the books and glanced inside.

"The Wendigo," I said, and looked at the boy. "Is this story where you got your name?"

He nodded eagerly. "Yes! It's a ripping yarn—" He used the English slang. "Have you read it?"

"No," I admitted, but felt flattered that he thought I had.

"What is it about?"

"A monster that lives in the great North Woods. This man, Blackwood—he really knows his stuff. It's all true, too. You're in the woods, you wander too far from the campfire—that's when the Wendigo gets you. Calls you by your name, then tears you limb from limb. No one ever gets a good look at it. No one ever knows what hit 'em. Perfect name for me, don't you think?"

He gave me a cheeky grin, flashing a set of surprisingly white, even teeth.

"It suits you," I said, and looked down at the book again.

... the Voice they say, resembles all the minor sounds of the Bush—wind, falling water, cries of animals, and so forth. And once the victim hears that—he's off for good, of course! His most vulnerable parts, moreover, are said to be the feet and the eyes; the feet, you see, for the lust of wandering, and the eye for the lust

of beauty. The poor beggar goes at such a dreadful speed that he blinks beneath the eyes, and his feet burn.

I sat broodingly for a few minutes, while Wendigo crunched at another bone. All unwilling, my mind harked back to the last time I had seen Frankenstein's creature, his form wrapped in a cerement of flame. He had no more asked for life than I had, or the Children of Cain. He had lost his life—more than once, if I counted his existence before Pretorius, and his near-miraculous survival from the first fire that had engulfed him in the windmill. He had been born, and died, and born again; yet he had never received the gifts or education that I had been given: intellect and calm persuasion, the ability to read, and reason, and imagine myself as something other than what the world had intended me to be, a creature limited by my sex and the circumstances of my creation.

What might Frankenstein's monster have become, had he been given my advantages?

Angrily I pushed the thought away, and with it the realization, still only half-formed, that I had begun to think of the creature as *he* and not *it*. I turned to Wendigo and spoke.

"The last place I spent any time—a village a day's ride from here. The men were terrified of me."

Wendigo picked at a front tooth and looked at me with one raised eyebrow. "So?"

"But you are not." I extended my arms, the fretwork of scars there plain to see, and turned my head to expose the scars on my neck. "And yet you are a boy—a young man," I added hastily, lest I offend him. "Much younger than those men I saw. And much braver, it seems."

"I've done a lot of research." He gestured at the stacks of magazines and shrugged. "There's a lot that goes on that people don't know about. I believe that the more you learn about this

sort of thing, the better prepared you'll be when you finally meet it. Or her," he added, and winked at me.

"Better prepared to meet things like the Wendigo?"

"Yes. Or you. Other things, too. You've heard of the man in Berlin who has created a woman from metal and glass?"

I frowned. Had this boy gotten his story wrong, living in woods like this? Was he in fact referring to me?

"Do you mean Dr. Frankenstein?" I asked cautiously. "Or perhaps his mentor, Dr. Pretorius?"

Wendigo shook his head. "Nein. I mean Dr. Rotwang. He lives in one of the worst parts of the city, in a house that's barely standing—but inside, he creates miracles. Extraordinary things! The woman he has made, she moves and talks just like a woman made of flesh and blood. But her skin is formed of metal, and her eyes glow like electrical lamps. She is extraordinary."

I couldn't help it: I laughed. "Is this another monster from a foreign land, that you've only read of in your books?"

"No! She is here in our country. In Berlin." He hesitated. "I have seen her."

His expression grew distant, solitary and dream-soaked; as though I was no longer in the tent with him, and he sat alone reading one of those luridly enticing magazines.

"She is remarkable," he said. "She is . . . beautiful."

I confess, I felt a twinge of jealousy at his words. Not that I wanted this boy's affection or attention for myself—but that he should be so moved by another creature whose parentage (if I can call it that) sounded not unlike my own.

And that there should even *be* another creature like myself in the world—and in Berlin, no less! It seemed so strange as to invite ridicule.

"Beautiful?" I scoffed. "How can such a thing be real, let alone beautiful?"

The boy looked at me as though I were joking.

"You're real," he blurted out; then immediately blushed. Because, of course, he had not added *And you're beautiful*.

At that moment I understood, as I had not truly understood before, that my own beauty was not always apparent, especially to men—even to boys.

And I realized something else as well. In spite of Dr. Pretorius's influence and affection, and his insistence that my mind was my greatest asset, I was not immune to that great human sickness, vanity.

"Beauty is a temporary disfigurement," I said coldly. "Death will cure you of it, in no time. But I have survived death—"

I raised my head to gaze at him with more hauteur than I truly felt. "I doubt that Rotwang's beauty has done the same."

Wendigo stared at the scars on my neck.

"She's never been dead," he admitted. "But then, she was never alive, either. She's a metal woman—a fembot, he calls her. So she can't really die. She walks among the workers and poor people and speaks of insurrection and violence. A revolution. That was why Rotwang created her. To make trouble," he ended, and smiled with unabashed admiration.

"I'm surprised you're so easily impressed by a metal woman." I surveyed our surroundings, the shabby tent smelling of woodsmoke, the scorched bones in a clumsily woven basket; those much-thumbed penny novels of the American frontier and American aboriginals and demons in the Canadian wilderness. "Or any woman at all."

Wendigo shrugged. "Our country is broken." He sounded older than his seventeen years. "Our world is broken. Someone has to fix it. Rotwang's desire is to build a new city, and then a new world—but he will destroy the old one first, and everyone in it."

I snorted. "An ambitious man."

"He sure is." Wendigo laughed, and looked more like a boy again. "Fortunately, he has lots of help with that."

"Like the murderer who butchers young women like sheep?"
 "Dr. Pretorius?" Wendigo nodded avidly. "Yes, he's doing his part, from what the newspapers say."
 "Pretorius is innocent of any such crime!" I fought to keep my voice from breaking. "He would never kill anyone, especially a woman!"

"Oh really?" Wendigo gazed pointedly at my neck.
 "The circumstances of my birth are . . . complicated. I can assure you, there was no murder, certainly no murder that Pretorius committed with his own hands."
 "But he may have *commissioned* murders," countered Wendigo.

At Wendigo's curious look I did, "I said, almost to myself."
 "Frankenstein? Never heard of him."

I felt a flicker of the annoyance I'd experienced moments before, at mention of Rotwang's creation.

"He's very well-known," I said haughtily.
 Wendigo shrugged. "Maybe in the hinterlands. In Berlin, all the talk is of Rotwang, and Pretorius—all right, *not* Pretorius, but whoever is killing those girls. Not that he's the only one," he went on. His excitement grew even more ghoulish. "The child-killer, the man who hunts little girls—you've heard of him? No?"

He looked disappointed. "Oh, he's a bad one! Some of the kids here in my camp, they have nightmares about him—Pfeifer, the Whistler, the papers call him. 'Cause he whistles when he works. Like this—"

Wendigo pursed his lips and produced an eerie, repetitive melody.

"Not that he's ever gone for boys," he explained. "Folks are really in an uproar over him—our kind of folks, I mean," and he grinned. "The police are tearing Berlin apart looking for him—it's completely disrupted the black market. Ordinary god-fearing criminals can't make a living these days. That's

why we left, my boys and me. Things were getting too hot in the city. Now, of course, they're getting too cold out here. Might be time to head back and see if things have calmed down a bit."

He stood and slapped his thighs, as though he were going to head to Berlin at that very instant. "I better go see how things are outside."

I went with him back out of the tent. It looked to be midday, though the colorless gray sky and chill wind made it feel much later.

"Will you return to Berlin, then?" I asked.
 Wendigo adjusted his Tyrolean hat, its macabre bone ornaments dancing in the wind, and touched the linked moon and sun hanging around his neck. "Eventually. Why? Are you anxious to be there?"

I looked to where Thea crouched alongside several boys in front of a campfire. She'd commandeered a navy's jacket from one of them, along with a long red scarf that, despite its grime, gave her a rakish air.

"Well, the cold doesn't bother me so much." I made a wry face.
 "But as you can see, my friend isn't dressed for a wilderness winter. So I don't see that we have much choice."

Despite my words, I shivered, and glanced at Schattengeist standing beneath a barren oak. Wendigo's gaze followed mine. His brow furrowed and he rubbed his chin, as though that might make its faint stubble turn into a proper beard.

"I might have an idea," he said after a moment. "Or, well, maybe not an idea, but a deal. Let me think about it for a while."

He stuck two fingers in his mouth and gave an ear-splitting whistle. Thea's newfound companions left her and ran toward us across the stony riverbank. Within minutes, the rest of the Wild-boys had joined them and gathered around us. Most appeared expectant, even eager, though I noted that Fox-

blood still regarded me with suspicion tinged with outright hostility.

Wendigo looked them all up and down. He began to pace, his hand upon the grip of his pistol.

"Our guests are cold," he finally announced.

"Us too!" a boy shouted, then looked abashed. "Well, me, anyway," he added as the rest sniggered.

Wendigo gave him a tight smile. "Me, too. But we're used to it. And dressed for it. Our guests are not."

"They're women," said Foxblood. His eyes fixed on me with a look of such contempt that even Henry Frankenstein had never betrayed. "Let them freeze."

A vein pulsed along Wendigo's jaw. "They're our guests,"

"Your guests," Foxblood stared back at him, unafraid. "Since when do we let women into our camp? One woman, anyway." He cocked his chin toward me. "Not sure what you'd call *that*."

"My camp," said Wendigo. His voice was calm, but his eyes glittered dangerously. "In the wilderness, we welcome outlaws. That's always been our way."

"Outlaws, yes. But women?" Foxblood spat, and a few of the other boys murmured in assent. "I came here to get away from them."

"Then maybe it's time you leave." Wendigo stared at the other boy in open challenge. "You and anyone who feels the same way you do."

Foxblood said nothing. But his face flushed angrily, and several of the other boys drew close to him, muttering under their breath.

"You get the impression we've overstayed our welcome?" Thea murmured as she edged up beside me. "Such as it was..."

I nodded, keeping an eye on Wendigo. The younger boys had clustered near him, but most of the older ones seemed ei-

ther to have thrown their allegiance with Foxblood, or to be waiting to see how this little game played out before they chose sides.

Either way, I couldn't see it turning out for my benefit, or Thea's.

"We have to leave," I announced bluntly. "We've already stayed too long."

"That's right," said Foxblood in a low voice. "It's good that someone understands how things are supposed to work around here."

He withdrew a knife with a jagged blade and began to toy with it with studied nonchalance. Thea glanced at me, then at Schattengeist standing impatiently beneath the trees.

"No time for long goodbyes, Pandora," she said under her breath. "Time to run."

Before I could reply, Foxblood struck.

"Pandora!" gasped Thea as he knocked her to the ground. There was a *whoosh*, and his blade slashed the air by my face. I ducked then turned to grab him—but not before the blade raked my arm. A seam of flesh split from shoulder to elbow. Thea cried out. Some of the wild-boys cheered as Foxblood staggered back, panting, and broke into a grin of triumph.

"That's how we treat uninvited guests!" he crowed.

I stared at my arm. A ragged line of skin peeled back, exposing bone and twisted skeins of muscle and blue veins.

But no blood.

I felt almost no pain: only a sort of dull, cold ache that radiated from where the blade had cut deepest. I ran my fingers along the loose seam of flesh, pressed the edges of the wound until they folded down, like a clumsily wrapped package. The older, original scars shone almost black against my livid skin, but this fresh wound gleamed violet, like a bruise. I had no idea if it would heal, or if the flesh would petrify or decay, though when I flexed my arm it moved with ease. Only a white flash of bone betrayed where I had been injured.

"There's no blood."
The whispered words came from a young boy who stared at me in wonder.

But when my gaze locked with his, he backed away. His amazement turned to terror as he looked around wildly, until he saw Wendigo.
"Wendigo." The boy's voice rose. "Wendigo, she's not bleeding. She's—"

Wendigo stared at me. A tremor of fear moved across his face; no more. He gave me an almost imperceptible nod, his hand closing on his pistol. Behind him Thea had gotten to her feet again, and I saw the glint of a stiletto between her fingers.

I turned to Foxblood. His triumphant grin had curled into disbelief. He stared at my arm, then lifted his head to gaze at me in revulsion.

"*Leiche*." As he spat the word he recoiled. "*Corpse*. She is undead."

The other boys followed his lead and backed away. Their expressions, too, had changed from fear and anger to horrified disgust. Even Wendigo looked at me with profound unease.

"They're right," he said in a low voice. He gestured at Schattengeist. "You and your friend—you'd better go."

"Go?" broke in Foxblood. "You ask them to go? What, are you afraid to kill them?"

Wendigo turned on him furiously. "How do you kill a corpse! No!" He looked back at me, eyes steely in his sunburned face. "*Leiche*! Do as I say—go! Now, before I change my mind!"

His voice shook. The boys surrounded him, younger ones and older ones alike, and pulled out makeshift weapons—knives and daggers—or else stooped to grab at stones and fallen branches to use as clubs. Even Foxblood seemed to have thought better of his earlier outburst. Now he stood shoulder-

to-shoulder with Wendigo, the two of them brandishing their weapons, jagged blade and pistol, both pointed at Thea. "Pandora!" She tugged her borrowed jacket tight and shot me an uneasy look. "I would say that this is a good time to say thank you and farewell."

As though echoing her words, Schattengeist gave a high, belling cry. At the sound, Wendigo turned to stare longingly at the demon-horse.

"We will go," I beckoned to Thea, and the two of us hurried toward Schattengeist. The Wild-boys shrank back as we passed, all but Wendigo.

"Pandora," he called.

Thea ran ahead to pull herself on our mount, but I stopped as Wendigo ran up beside me.

"Be wary in Berlin," he said. "Remember what I told you—there are others like yourself—other . . . things."

He licked his lips as though tasting something bad. "Pfeifer, the Whistler. And the fembot. Rotwang is an evil man. And evil begets evil."

"Like this *leiche*," snarled Foxblood.

"No," Wendigo stared at me and shook his head. "I do not think you're evil, Pandora. No more than me, anyway," he added. "No more than anyone trying to survive in these evil days."

"Thank you. I'll be watchful."

"Wait." Wendigo dipped his head. He grasped the symbol that hung around his neck, the linked moon and sun, and with a tug pulled it from its bit of dirty string. "Here—"

He took my hand. I could feel him shudder at my touch, but his eyes held mine warmly as he smiled. "Take this. Go to the *Oneirostrasse*—there's a place there called the *Mondkellar*, the *Moonekellar*. It's a *nachlokal*—a private club—but if you show them this they'll give you entry. Tell them I sent you and your friend, and that they should help you. At the least

they'll give you shelter for a night or two. Maybe find you some work, even," he said with a laugh.

"Thank you." I clasped the sigil tightly, then put it in my pocket. "If I ever have the chance to repay you—"

"This isn't a gift." Wendigo turned to gaze at Schattengeist.

"It's a loan. In exchange for that, I want you to give me the horse."

"Now?"

He shook his head, lowering his voice. "I'll tell you the route to take. On the outskirts of the city there's a farm— you show them that sigil, tell them they're to keep the horse for me.

"They'll take good care of him. Tell them I'll come for him in the next few weeks."

I started to protest but he cut me off.

"A horse—even that horse, *especially* that horse—it would only be a liability in Berlin these days. Someone would slit your throat for it—*her* throat, anyway." He gestured at Thea.

"And with all the automobiles, a horse isn't much use in the city these days. Not unless you can eat it. Besides, you won't need a mount to get around the city. Not that kind of mount, anyway," he said, and made a lewd kissing sound.

"The horse isn't mine," I said. "It belongs to Dr. Pretorius—"

"I give you my word of honor, Pandora. I'll care for it as though it were one of my lads here."

He doffed his cap in the direction of the other Wild-boys.

"I know horses—grew up with 'em. A creature like that, it wants to run free. It doesn't want to bear riders in a filthy place like Berlin."

I listened, and finally nodded. Not without reluctance, but I had no real choice.

Besides, I knew that Wendigo was right. Schattengeist was no more fit for the city than I was.

I drew no comfort from the thought.

"Very well," I said. "But you must promise. If—when—I find Dr. Pretorius again, and we find our way back to you— then you will return Schattengeist to his rightful owner."

"Done."

Wendigo swept his hat in front of him and made a mocking bow, his long braid sweeping the ground and his ornamental bones rattling. "Now, fair Pandora, I bid you *auf weiderschen*."

"Pandora! Thea's voice came anxiously from astride Schattengeist. 'Let's go.'"

"Now listen to me," Wendigo pointed at the river. "Follow that downstream, it'll take you to the city. A half-day's journey on horseback. Maybe less, with the horse you're riding. And make sure you bring him to that farm before you reach Berlin. Otherwise someone will slit your friend's pretty little throat, for a horse like that."

I swung myself onto Schattengeist's back, with Thea behind me. The horse shrieked and tossed its head, sending a dozen ravens skirling into the gray sky.

"I'll leave him with your friends outside Berlin," I said to Wendigo, and grasped Schattengeist's mane. "But remember your promise."

Wendigo's face split into a broad grin.

"*Dank*," he said. "And don't worry—I'll come for him."

Schattengeist reared. His hooves struck sparks from the rocky ground. The Wild-boys scattered as the horse turned and raced down the riverbank, heading south. I glanced back and saw that the Wild-boys had already disappeared into the woods.

All save Wendigo. He lifted his hand in farewell. I did the same, then turned away. As I did, my injured arm brushed against Thea's.

I felt her flinch. When I looked at her, she would not meet my eyes.

CHAPTER 10

We rode for the rest of the day.

Often I felt as though we were being followed. Strange noises echoed through the trees—snapping branches, a sudden explosive flight of birds—and once I half-glimpsed a massive figure, too tall to be a man but the wrong shape for bear or wolf. I thought of the demon in Wendigo's story—the Voice that imitated the sounds of the forest—and shivered.

I did not believe in demons—in my experience, mortal men were capable of terrible things without supernatural assistance—but I was disturbed by the idea that we were being stalked.

And, try as I might, I never caught sight of our pursuer. Instead I brooded obsessively on who it might be. I thought of the whistling killer Wendigo had warned me of, the *Pfäfer*, but Thea and I were not children, and he seemed an urban criminal, safely ensconced in Berlin's gritty underworld. Rotwang's fembot also seemed unlikely to venture from beneath the city's streets. Henry Frankenstein's creature might well crash through the trees, but, clumsy and stupid as he was, surely he would have revealed himself by now?

And Henry himself would not have wasted time creeping through the thickets, I was sure of that. Well-equipped with guns and other weapons, not to mention enthralled country louts who would do his bidding, Henry Frankenstein would have fired upon us by now.

The thought did not comfort me.

I did my best to hide my fears from Thea. She dozed for much of the way, her head resting upon my shoulder. In sleep, at least, she did not wince at the touch of my cold skin.

Evergreen forests gave way to gentler woodlands, woods to farms and pasturage and then, as the afternoon waned into gray-blue twilight, a shimmer on the horizon like a mirage from the Arabian Nights.

"Berlin," said Thea. She reached to smooth her tousled hair, shook her head. "And look at me! I'm a wreck. Good thing Wendigo gave us the name of that other club, 'cause the boss at any place wouldn't let us in the door."

"We're not there yet." I stared grimly through the gathering dusk. "That farm shouldn't be much farther. And after that we're on foot."

Schattengeist snorted, as though anticipating an end to his labors. Thea sighed and rubbed her leg. The remnants of a silk stocking hung from it in shreds. "I can't wait," she said.

In another quarter-hour we found the farmstead, a small, surprisingly tidy house surrounded by outbuildings and a good-sized barn where a few cows stood and regarded Schattengeist with mild eyes.

"You stay here, Pandora," Thea said as she clambered from the horse. "Don't want to frighten the good *bauer*. Give me that medallion Wendigo gave you and I'll take care of everything."

"No." I dismounted, patted Schattengeist's steaming flank as I looped his chain around a post. "Wendigo gave it to me. You come along if you like."

Thea looked hurt. "What? You don't trust me?"

I shrugged. "You know that I trust you as much as I trust anyone. But he put it into my safekeeping, and I'll keep it there."

"Suit yourself," Thea sniffed.

The farmwife met us at the front door, a tall, rawfaced woman who looked almost strong enough to wrestle a saddle onto Schattengeist, should the need arise. She brandished an ancient firearm, pointing it from me to Thea then back to me again.

"Stop." With her free hand she held up a lantern, and waved at us. "Another step and you're dead."

Her eyes widened. I could see the thought racing through her head, that I was dead already. Before she could scream, or fire, I pulled Wendigo's talisman from my pocket and held it before her.

"I was given this as a token by one who knows you. He said that you'd care for our horse, until we can return it to its rightful owner."

The woman let her breath out in a low hiss. "Oskar..."

She reached to touch the carved disk holding both sun and moon. Her gaze softened, and a faint smile made her look suddenly much younger. "He is alive, then. He is well!"

Then she glanced at me again and her hand tightened on her gun. "If you have harmed him—"

"No," Thea broke in hastily. "He's fine! Wendigo, he calls himself now—he and the other Wild-boys, we came upon them in the woods. We were—looking for safety. They helped us."

The woman peered around us to where Schattengeist's dark form loomed just inside the barn. "That's your horse?"

"Yes." I nodded and slipped the disk back into my pocket.

"Wendigo said he'd come for him in a few weeks."

"Wendigo?" Her smiled broadened. Unexpectedly she laughed. "Is that what he calls himself now? Some name from one of his storybooks?"

She relaxed her hold on the gun. "He's my brother," she explained. "Oskar. He ran off the first time because our father beat him, because..."

She looked at us and shook her head. "Well, because he had more interest in those Wild-boy friends of his than he did in Tingel-Tangel girls. Maybe he's changed his mind, eh?"

Thea winked at her. "Could be."

The woman laughed. "All right, then. I'll tend your horse for him. Looks like a monster. Is it a Pergamon?"

I did my best to explain Schattengeist, without mentioning Dr. Petorius, or the amount of food it would take to keep the great horse from wreaking havoc in that well-kept barn. The woman showed little interest, though; she wanted only to hear of her little brother. The scent of roasting chicken wafted around us as she beckoned first me, then Thea, inside a small kitchen. I told her what I knew of the boy who'd called himself Wendigo, while Thea drifted off to find a mirror and wash-basin.

"I wish Oskar would come back and stay with me," the woman said wistfully when I'd finished. "I could use his help. And I worry about him out there."

She glanced at her weapon, still clutched in one work-roughened hand, then at me.

"You know it is not safe, even here in the countryside," she said in a low voice. "Last night I heard a terrible row in the chicken coop. Fox, I thought, or a tramp—and I know how to handle both of those."

She hefted the gun and aimed it at me, but I only stared at her unflinching. After a moment she dropped it again and went on. "So I went out to the shed."

She hesitated, and I asked, "And was there a man there?"

"No." She shuddered, licking her dry lips as though she tasted something bad. "One of my hens was dead—that one," she said, and gestured toward the cookstove. "But another one—my best layer, too—something had torn her apart."

"It was a fox, then."

"No." She shook her head emphatically. "No fox did this. Something had ripped her in two, like this—"

She dropped the gun into her apron and demonstrated with her hands. "Just so. Split her apart like she was a wishbone, then at her—but not like a fox does. This way—"

She chomped her teeth together. "Like a person, but what person—what man, even?—tears a chicken in two then eats it

raw? Because whatever got into my henhouse, he—it—at least raw. Ate some of the bones, too. Like this—"

She made a crunching sound, then shuddered again and withdrew the gun from her apron. "These are terrible times, *Schwester*, when a man acts like a beast." I pushed aside the image of her brother munching on the bones of god knows what creature; pushed aside another image, too, one even more disturbing. Instead I asked if she had heard of the villains Wendigo had spoken of: Rorwag and his metal woman, and the child murderer.

"You mean *den Pfeifer*—the Whistler." She glanced usually out the darkened window. "Yes, of course—everyone knows of him. I have no children to worry about, but I had a letter from my former sister-in-law—her neighbor's husband's brother's oldest son, he writes for the *Deutsche Zeitung*. They've set all their reporters on it, trying to follow the story. And also to claim the reward, *natürlich*."

She tucked the gun back into her apron, then crossed to the stove and opened it, letting out a plume of rosemary-scented steam. "I don't know what killed my good hen. But unless the Pfeifer is eating those children..."

She straightened, covered her hands with two heavy towels, and placed the chicken on a small table. She flapped the towels to cool them, then turned, hands on hips, and looked pointedly at my neck. Her mouth opened to form a question, but before she could speak Thea came back into the room. Her hair was slicked back and her face cleaner, if a bit too well-scrubbed for the sort of company I suspected she'd soon be keeping.

"We'd better leave, Pandora," she said. "If we're to reach Berlin before midnight, and—"

She stopped and inhaled deeply, then gazed with round eyes at the chicken steaming on the table.

"Bine" Wendigo's sister took carving knife and fork and set to work. "I will give you some to take with you." A few minutes later we stood in the doorway again, laden with a goodly portion of roasted hen and a few slabs of coarse bread, all wrapped in a threadbare cloth. As we turned to go, the woman hesitantly touched my hand.

"Your injuries," she asked in a low voice. She stared again at my neck. "What—what happened?"

I stared back but said nothing. After a moment she ducked her head, pulled back the sleeve of her worn dress to reveal an arm furrowed from wrist to elbow with long crimson scars.

"My husband," she said. "He pushed me into a threshing machine because I did not have dinner for him when he came home from the fields one afternoon. I was pregnant and lost the child. My little brother killed him when he found out. I'm not sorry. That's when Oskar ran off the second time—for good, into the woods with those friends of his. He has a good heart, my brother. But this is not a time for good hearts, only strong ones."

Her gaze met mine, at once cold and accepting. "I'll see to your horse, *schwester*. Here, wait—"

She turned back inside and returned a minute later with a battered oil lantern. "You'll need this. The oil won't last you—the city's a good three hours from here—but it will help some. Take care on the road, sisters."

"Thank you," I said. "Tell Wendigo—Oskar—that I will reclaim the horse when the time is right."

She nodded, waving as Thea and I trudged back along the gutted path leading to the main thoroughfare. At the barn I stopped to say farewell to Schattengeist.

"I'll see you again," I murmured, stroking his neck. "Dr. Pretorius will find you, I promise."

But would he? Would I ever see Dr. Pretorius again, or Cesare? My thoughts were uneasy ones as Thea and I walked on in silence. Not even warm chicken and good bread were enough to turn my mind from what the woman had told me about the thing that had raided her henhouse.

Ungeheuerlichkeit: monstrous.

My mind turned back to a night weeks earlier, when I had lain long awake and listened to the sound of something lurching through the woods. Its clumsy gait, its strangled cry; the beak trodden to pulp where it had staggered back and forth, as though desperately looking for something.

Or someone. I thought of the form I had seen, or imagined I'd seen, in the forest; I thought of Henry Frankenstein's creature, that towering figure aflame; his great misshapen head tilted sideways to stare at me as his hands worked the air, as though writing the words there.

Wife. Friend...

"No," I said.

"What?" Thea looked at me quizzically.

"Nothing," I said, and we walked on without speaking toward Berlin.

In those hours my thoughts turned often to my lost companions—more than companions—Dr. Pretorius, Cesare, the Children of Cain; even Goli the six-legged dog. Monsters or inverts, some people would call them, yet they were my family; the individuals I had come to love most in this world. I thought of Henry Frankenstein, and of how he had turned his back upon his creations—his children—deeming them unnatural and thus unworthy of his affection. Humans—ordinary humans, anyway; what the world called "normal"—seemed to limit the range of their emotions and attachments.

And so Henry Frankenstein could marry his fair Elizabeth, beget a child, then disown his other children: myself and the

monster, creatures who (in my instance, at least) would claim free will and thought for themselves.

Frankenstein had no qualms about creating slaves—or murdering women. His wife seemed to have no reservations about cleaving to her husband, and thus his work.

Yet stood before a court of law, or a roomful of peasant farmers, I had no doubt as to which of us would be judged the monster, and which the upstanding German citizen.

Would a day dawn, I wondered, when it might be otherwise? At the moment, any hope of dawn was a distant one. I guessed it was close to midnight. We were near Berlin. The glittering mirage that had glowed like a beacon in the distance now began to break

into distinct jots and blocks of light, where faraway tall buildings and spires shone through the night. Thea carried the lantern, but its wan light did little to dispel the darkness immediately around us—it barely helped us to avoid the potholes and ditches that were everywhere. There'd been no money for even rudimentary road maintenance in years.

Still, as we continued the road gradually started to widen. Its ruts and furrows became more the work of petrol-fired vehicles and their human drivers, than horse-drawn carts or bad weather. Farmsteads were replaced by villages; the villages gave way to the city's sprawling outskirts. Automobiles passed us, veering wildly as we stumbled to the roadside and Thea tried vainly to flag down one of the passing vehicles. Instead of woodsmoke and the tang of fallen leaves, I could smell burning coal, petrol fumes, tobacco, the hot stink of cooking grease.

"*Klapperkiste!*" Thea shouted as another clattertrap vehicle jounced past us, sending up a spray of dust and grit. "Boneshaker!"

She flung the lantern furiously after it. The oil had long since run out, but Thea had clung to it anyway, out of childish fear or perhaps in hopes that we might sell it when we reached the city. The automobile sped on, the lamp smashed into the road.

Thea swore and bent to remove one shoe. "You may have to carry me, Pandora."

She rubbed her swollen foot, looked up, and grinned. "Hey, it's a good excuse for not dancing, right? Lola will take one look at this—"

She held up the shoe, its heel a broken nub.

"There's no way she can make me go on tonight. Not unless she gets me a new pair of shoes," she said, musing. "Which I suppose she could, though there's no guarantee they'd be my size."

"But we're not going to your nightclub. I dug in my pocket for the carven talisman Wendigo had given me. The Mondkellar—that's where Wendigo said we should head."

Thea shrugged and jammed the shoe back onto her foot. "I know—but I need to get back to work. Lola wouldn't take it well, if I ditched her for another club. She has a proprietary interest in my career."

By now we'd reached one of the main roads leading directly into the city. Berlin's fairy lights obscured by bleak tenement blocks and ragged trees. The stink of outdoor latrines and overflowing drains won out over smells of frying potatoes and spilled beer. People hurried along the darkened streets. Couples returning home from a night out; students—all young men—singing cheerfully and drunkenly; prostitutes, some barely more than children, others old enough to be grandmothers. Many of them recognized Thea and called out to us, taunting or imploring her as we passed.

"Thea! How's the air up there, eh?"

"Oooh, Thea's stepping out with someone else tonight!"

"Hey darling, we miss you! Get back on the line!"

Thea waved but didn't stop to chat.

"She means the chorus line, of course," she said as we walked by a girl in a cat-fur jacket and knee-high, apple-green boots.

"Of course," I said.

"We worked together at the Toppkeller for a while. Before she started to specialize and became a boot-girl."

"Sure," Thea turned and blew a kiss at another girl, wearing a boy's sailor suit and cap. "Polly there, she's a *Nutte*—lots of them. This part of town, most of the girls are *kontroll-girls*—you know, registered with the police. But where we're going, Schöneberg—that's where you find specialists. Minettes, telephone girls. And boys. You know."

I tried not to look taken aback. I had heard of such things, of course, but to see the world around me so abruptly transformed into a vast marketplace was still a shock.

"Is everyone—working?" I asked.

Thea laughed. "Of course not. It only seems that way at night. Everything has a price, Pandora!"

I shook my head, then self-consciously tugged at my collar. "I don't. I think I am too . . . specialized . . . for your friends."

"You'd be surprised. Hey!"

Thea drew up short as an automobile pulled up alongside us, engine chugging. Two young men in evening clothes peered out at us. One—the driver—waved a monogrammed silver flask.

"Thea!" he cried. "Long time no see!"

Thea grinned and leaned into the car's open window. "Hullo, Hansie. Hullo, Bernard. Where you boys off to?"

"To see Professor Unrat."

Hansie, the driver, handed her the flask. Thea took a sip, held it out to me but I demurred, so she passed it on to Bernard. "Herr Professor's giving classes at night now?"

"Classes!" The two young men burst out laughing. "You really *have* been away too long! No, he's working at a private club these days. He performs—you know, sings and dances."

Now it was Thea's turn to look shocked. "The Professor?"

Hansie nodded. "What—has he gone mad?"

"Crazed with love," said Bernard. "Didn't you hear? He married a showgirl! See where it's got him?"
 He reached out to elbow Thea. "You and your friend want to come along? You could see for yourself?"
 "Sure." Thea looked at me. "We could use a ride, at any rate. What club's he playing?"
 "The Mondkellar."

"You're joking, right?" Thea glanced at me, trying not to show her surprise. "The Mooncellar? That's where we were headed."

"Meant to be, then," said Hansie. He leaned toward Bernard and whispered something, and they both laughed.
 Thea looked at me. "We could always ditch these guys," she whispered. "But it *is* where we were going. And I'm tired of walking..."

I nodded. "Me too."

Bernard opened the door. "C'mon, hop in."

We clambered into the vehicle and Hansie swung it back into the street. Bernard offered Thea a cigarette from a silver case.
 "Thanks." She waited for him to light it, then blew a stream of blue smoke into his face. "I can't believe the professor married And to a showgirl. Guess that's why it's so cold tonight. Hell finally froze over!"

Hansie laughed. "So who's your girlfriend, Thea?"

"Where's my manners?" Thea made an exaggerated gesture of dismay, and leaned in to press her cheek to mine. "This is Pandora. She's my, uh, cousin. From the country. So be polite."

"She doesn't look like a farm girl," said Hansie. "Dora, eh? Or is that *Dodo*?"

The two students laughed, while Thea slapped Bernard, protesting, "She is *not* a dodo—"

She glanced at me and adjusted my collar. "Even if she *is* dressed like one. Your tuxedo jacket," she explained. "And

your hair. It's a look that dodos—um, women who dress in men's formal wear—favor."

"A popular look, in some places," broke in Hansie, and laughed again.
 We drove along the city's broad streets, dodging streetcars and pedestrians and other automobiles.

"It's so big," I said, my face pressed against the grimy window. "This city."

"Berlin's almost as big as London and New York," boasted Hansie. "Over four million people now."

"An easy place to get lost in," agreed Bernard. He looked at Thea and wiggled his eyebrows. "Right, *Schätzchen*?"
 I couldn't argue with him. Bernard proudly pointed out the Radio Tower, which shone so far above the city streets it was like gazing at a mountain-peak. Electric lights shone as well, a disconcerting sight after so many weeks in the countryside, where nightfall meant true darkness.

But not along the Unter den Linden or other major thoroughfares. Electric lights shone everywhere, as well as gaslamps that cast wan pools of light along the sidewalks, which seemed to grow emptier and more desolate the longer we drove. One-armed or legless soldiers begged beneath theater marquees advertising plays and revues—"Get Undressed!" "Showgirls' Holiday." The car veered off the main road and into an alley, and then into another, and another, until I felt dizzy and frightened and utterly lost. I found myself staring at every shadowy figure lurking in a doorway, every tall man in a heavy overcoat who tumbled from a bar or club.

Any one of them could have been Henry Frankenstein's monster. None of them was.

We drove past an ungainly and immense railway station of old brick, and another brick structure, domed; then turned down yet another winding street, lined with small shops, now

shuttered, in the bottom floors of five-story buildings. Hansie pulled the car behind one of these and parked alongside as overflowing rubbish tip.

"My apologies for the rats," he said as he hopped out and held the door for us. Thea wrinkled her nose as several large rodents scurried into the darkness. "But one can't always choose one's companions, right?"

Hansie took Thea's arm. Bernard reached for mine, and before I could stop him grasped my elbow.

"Brrr!" He snatched his hand back and looked at me in astonishment. "Kaltblütig! Christ, you're coldblooded!"

Thea pushed Hansie away and linked her arm firmly through mine. "I told you—she's an innocent country girl, not some pampered old thing like the girls *you* hang out with. A little chill doesn't bother her. Pandora's made of sterner stuff."

"Feels more like she's made of marble," said Bernard, and blew ostentatiously on his fingers.

I plucked at my jacket, grateful the darkness had kept him from seeing the scars where my sleeves had ridden up. Thea turned to stare at me pointedly. "Do you have a chill, Dora?"

"Yes," I said. "Yes, I'm—I'm very cold this evening." Bernard shot me a sympathetic glance, but made no further move to comfort me.

"Come on," called Hansie, now a few steps ahead of us. "It'll be warm inside."

We followed him. Thea looked up and down the street and frowned. I caught a glimpse of two figures standing in a shadowy doorway, talking. A prostitute and her prey, I thought.

But as we drew closer I revised that impression and felt a stab of shame. For the pair was in fact a child and her father, the man leaning toward her with a smile and proffering a toy, a cheap rag doll, its too-vivid face painted in clownish colors.

"Hurry up!" cried Hansie. At his voice the man looked up quickly. I had no clear look at his face before he snatched the doll back and turned, pulling his hat down onto his forehead, and hurried into the darkness. A bar of light fell across the sidewalk as the door opened and a woman's scolding voice cried out at the child.

"Hannah! Come in now, what in God's name were you—" Then the door slammed shut again, the child disappeared inside. Thea took a few running steps to catch up with Hansie. "That woman sounded mad as a shaved cat! Where is everyone?" she asked. "Is business bad?"

"It's terrible," said Hansie. He took a swig from his flask. "People are afraid to venture outside, especially at night. Why, some people are so scared, they're actually choosing to work on their academic studies, rather than spend their nights at the Mondkellar."

"But not us," said Bernard. He grabbed the flask from his friend and drank. "Thank god, some of us keep the old ways alive." I hesitated, still a few feet from the darkened doorway. It seemed for an instant that I glimpsed another figure behind us, taller and more threatening than the man with his vulgar doll.

But then the shadowy form was gone, if indeed it had ever been there.

"Afraid?" I gasped, as I ran to catch up with the others. "Afraid of what?"

Hansie slid the flask back into his jacket. "Well, maybe out in the hinterlands you haven't heard. But there's a murderer on the loose, here in the city."

"More than one, the police say," interjected Bernard. "One is killing children. The other picks on women."

"Who could blame him?" Hansie gazed at Thea. "A beautiful, heartless young woman who refuses the love of a hard-working young man?"

Thea sniffed. "And that would be—?"

"Someone truly heartless," said Bernard. "Because the murderer removes their inner organs. Also, it seems, their brains, and—"

Thea pressed her hand against his mouth. "Stop. Unless you want to drive my cousin and me home immediately." Bernard pushed her hand aside and went on. "But that's not all! Because at the same time someone was cutting those ladies apart, someone *else* was putting a lady together."

"The fembot," said Hansie gleefully. "That's who we're going to see now—she's performing in the same club as the Professor."

"Fembot?" I said. "You mean Rotwang's metal woman?" Hansie looked at me. For the first time he seemed to notice the scars on my throat. He blinked then shook his head, as though dispersing a dream, and remarked in a dry voice, "I see that *someone* keeps up with the newspapers, anyway. Yes, Rotwang's metal woman."

"But how do you know of this?" I asked.

"I might ask you the same thing," Hansie turned down another alley, his pace quickening. "Seeing as how I live in Berlin, and you're supposedly living out there in the wilderness somewhere. If we're to believe Cousin Thea."

His tone, and the look he gave me, indicated he did not. "I know about this because Rotwang was a rival of Professor Unrat's when they were at the University. This was before Rotwang got fired for his experiments with dead bodies—"

"And before Professor's Unrat's experiments with a live one," said Bernard, and laughed.

"Rotwang and his fembot were cited for causing dissension in the streets." Hansie slowed his steps so we could catch up with him. "So he decided to keep a low profile at home, while she decided to do what any sensible radical would do, and hide in plain sight—right here, as a matter of fact."

He painted several doors down, to a darkened storefront. A young boy in a sailor shirt leaned against the wall, smoking. As we approached he straightened, tilted his chin, and looked at us challengingly.

"You lost, *mein Herrchen*?"

The building's windows had been painted black. The ornate, Baroque-style door's blue paint was peeling; beside it in a terra-cotta pot, several withered sticks were all that remained of a geranium.

Yet I could hear music and laughter from inside, punctuated by an occasional shriek and the clashing of cymbals. Still, there was no placard, no painted advertisement; nothing to indicate this was anything but an abandoned storefront.

Nothing save a faded symbol painted on the sidewalk at our feet: a rayed sun surmounted by a crescent moon.

"No, no, we're not lost . . ."

Hansie dug in his pocket, frowning, and after a minute held up a small round glinting object. A coin, I thought at first, then realized it was a gold disk stamped with the now-familiar sun and crescent moon. The boy looked at it grudgingly, then nodded and reached back to open a heavy wooden door.

"*Weitergehen*. Go on," he said, and motioned Hansie and Bernard inside.

But when Thea and I started to follow, the boy yanked the door shut again. "*Kein Chance, Madchen!* Not a chance! This is a private social club, by invitation only. Only two customers to a token."

He leaned back against the wall and gave me an insolent look.

"What about this?" I said, and pulled out Wendigo's talisman.

The boy's eyes widened. He grabbed the wooden disk and stared at it, then at me. "Where'd you get this?"

I took the disk back and slipped it into my pocket. "A friend."

"A friend, eh?" He dropped his cigarette and ground it out, then laughed. "Well, tell your friend next time you see him, that Hiawatha sends his regards."

He pushed the door open once more and gave a low whistle as we walked past. "Enjoy the show, *Madchen*—and welcome to the Mooncellar."

CHAPTER 11

Inside, Hansie and Bernard were nowhere to be seen. A hatcheck girl stood in an alcove, wagging her head in time to thumping music that echoed from the next room. When she glanced over at us, I saw that she had a butterfly tattooed on each cheek.

"Hatcheck? Coat check?"

"No thanks," I said.

Another woman, no taller than my thigh, sat on a stool in front of the hatcheck station, counting out bills. She gave Thea and me a bored look and returned to her task.

A few other people strolled in and out of the foyer, laughing or whispering intently, in various stages of intoxication or undress. A woman attired not unlike myself, though her tuxedo was immaculate and far more expensive than Cesare's, and she wore a monocle in one bright blue eye. A dark-skinned woman well over six feet tall, wearing a bustier in the shape of a birdcage, and nothing else. A man and a woman in matching kimonos, flanked by a brace of naked men whose bodies had been painted to resemble leopards.

"You know, Pandora, I don't think you're going to have to worry about standing out at the Mooncellar," confided Thea, as an enormously fat man wearing a wedding dress with a full satin train swept past us. "So if it's all the same to you, I may leave you for a bit and test the waters. See if I can find my way to a hot dinner, and maybe a better pair of shoes. Aren't you hungry?"

I shook my head. "Not really."

"Suit yourself. I'll find you later."

She stood on tiptoe and kissed my cheek, then flounced off. I glanced back to see the little woman on her stool looking at me.

"Main room's that way." She pointed at a doorway and smiled. "Floor show's due to start any minute." She winked, then went back to counting the evening's take.

It seemed that Thea was right: it was going to take more than a reanimated woman stitched together from corpses to raise an eyebrow at the Mooncellar; even—especially, maybe—a deathly pale woman in man's attire.

I thought with a pang of Dr. Pretorius. How he would have loved this parade of misfits! I looked around, half-expecting to see him and Cesare peering at me from a corner.

Instead, I saw the hatcheck girl staring at me intently, her eyes narrowing. I took a deep breath and went into the next room. As I did, I glanced back and saw the girl continuing to stare at me, as she reached for a telephone and began to dial. I hastened my steps until I was inside the club proper.

A pall of cigarette smoke hung over everything, along with the sweet scents of hashish and spilled brandy. Icy blue lights shone overhead, and lined the foot of an empty stage at the far end of a cavernous room. Walls were painted with full moons that leered or winked; crescent moons made of wood and tin dangled from the ceiling. At numerous tables the Mooncellar's clientele sat in twos and three and fives, laughing and talking animatedly as they smoked and drank. Stolid burghers like I'd seen on our travels, as well as the more eccentric characters I'd glimpsed in the foyer. Men and women carrying trays of drinks scurried about, wearing the Mooncellar's livery: black jackets, pale-blue shorts, clunky sky-blue boots, cocked caps with insectile antennae on them. On the perimeters of the room, young men and even younger women sat in glass-and-wood cubbyholes designed to resemble rocket-ships like those

I'd glimpsed in Wendigo's magazines, chatting on telephones and waving to each other. In one corner, a group of chorus girls and boys practiced what appeared to be an obscure religious rite involving chains, a bottle of champagne, and a Russian wolfhound. There was no one on the stage to entertain the crowd, but there didn't need to be.

"Smoke, darling?" A girl in a Mooncellar uniform held out a tray of cigarettes. When I declined politely she smiled. "Well, find me later. I'd love to know who does your hair."

I turned to see Thea sitting on the lap of a middle-aged man wearing a frayed Pierrot's tunic. She grinned and beckoned me over.

"Pandora! This is Professor Unrat." She kissed his bald head. "I know it's hard to believe, but he gave up teaching for *this*—" She gestured at the room around us, kicking her feet in the air like a girl. I noticed that she had replaced her ruined shoes with a pair of sky-blue boots.

"That is so." The Professor tugged thoughtfully at his gray wisp of beard. "At first, I will admit, I felt adrift. All that exposed flesh! My former wife is a cabaret performer," he explained, "and my initial immersion in her world was what one might call a baptism by fire. A year ago Lola and I parted ways—she is a talented amateur, I have more serious aspirations. I long to play great comic roles: Falstaff, Viktor Hempel. Because of my ambition, my former colleagues and students mocked me and invented tales of my dissolution and descent into madness. In fact, I enjoy my work and have gotten very good at it."

He tilted his head and made a droll expression, his gray-bearded face and spectacle utterly incongruous with his clown's costume and the dusting of rouge on his cheeks.

"And," he added with a nod toward the stage, "this employment gives me the opportunity to keep an eye on Rotwang's metal doll."

"You mean the fembot?" I gaped. "The metal woman created by your rival?"

"My rival?" Professor Unrat looked so mortally offended that Thea shot me a chiding look. "That pasty-faced blowhard! Rotwang was my *student*, not my rival! And a bad student at that! He and his friend Henry used to cheat on their examinations. I was amazed that either one of them was accepted into medical school, frankly."

"But his fembot—now, she's another matter. Quite the rouser. Inciting the workers to revolt, demanding equal pay for women . . . you'd call it comedy, if you saw it onstage." He did an exaggerated doubletake, causing Thea to fall from his lap, clapped, and pointed at the front of the room. "But see for yourselves!"

As though he'd given a cue, the ice-blue lights dimmed until the club was bathed in an eerie arctic glow. The crowd grew hushed and still, save for the drifting cloud of cigarette smoke and the occasional soft clink of a glass. From above the stage dropped an ornate swing, a gilded plank suspended by chains looped with glittering ropes spangled with stars and moons.

The blare of a jazz orchestra abruptly cut through the silence. Lights flared where the musicians stood on a raised platform near the stage. A pair of crimson follow-spots sliced through the blue shadows, throwing into shadow two females figures that stood, poised like figures from an Egyptian frieze on the swing. They moved like mirror images, slowly at first, then throwing themselves into a mad Charleston as the swing was lowered until it hung just inches above the stage.

Then the two dancers—who might have been twins, though the audience still could see nothing but their silhouetted forms—leaped from the swing as the band roared into the last notes of "Nachtexpress Nach Warschau." The stage lights went up in a blaze of red and gold, touching one of the two figures as she took

a bow. A slender girl in a fringed red dress, elfin face capped by close-cropped, glossy black hair, her upturned eyes lined with kohl and her lips curled in a radiant smile.

"That's Lulu," whispered the Professor.

Thea blinked in astonishment. "Your wife?"

"No—my wife's Lola. But shh—"

The followspot swept from Lulu to the other figure. It was as though incandescent light filled a crystal glass—but a glass shaped like a woman, with glowing crystal limbs and torso, glowing crystal eyes in a face that seemed made of molten steel. Her body was hairless, unencumbered by clothing; her joints as she moved gave off sparks of green and sapphire. All around me I heard a hiss as scores of people sucked in their breath; and then gasps and a sudden explosive rush as everyone exhaled and, as one, burst into applause.

"And *that* is Elfi," the Professor announced. "Excuse me, I must prepare myself for my act. I should have gone half an hour ago, but I can't resist making a good entrance after a beautiful woman."

Thea, who had climbed back into the Professor's lap, stood to let him go. With a bow he headed for the door. Thea turned and waved excitedly at the stage. The girl named Lulu waved back.

"You know her?" I asked.

"I know everyone," retorted Thea as she flopped into her seat. The crowd cheered. The orchestra broke into the rollicking strains of "Alexanderplatz" as the fembot stepped to the front of the stage.

With a dramatic flourish the music died. Lulu tossed her head and smiled that glorious smile. But all eyes were on the fembot Elfi as she slowly nodded, light falling across her silvery face like rain upon a window.

"Thank you," she said. A few gasps echoed through the room. Her voice was deep, throaty; she raised her arms, hands

out-turned as though imploring, and began to sing "Koffer in Berlin."

I could only stare, rapt as everyone else in that room. It wasn't just the simple, chrome-and-crystal miracle of a mechanical woman who could move and sing; she sang beautifully. And she was, herself, beautiful. Cold as a silver teapot, perhaps, but indisputably lovely. The jealousy I felt when Wendigo first spoke of Rotwang's creation flared up anew, but even stronger this time, tinged with something very close to rage. I found myself clutching the edge of the table, watching as that bright column of light sparkled and sang, and everyone around me whistled and stamped their feet when she at last fell silent.

Everyone, that is, save Lulu. She stood on the opposite side of the stage from Elfi, her delicate features composed into a smile so rigid that she looked more like a statue than her rival. As the fembot turned to leave, Lulu pranced to take her place.

"Now I'll show you something Elfi can't do," she announced. She winked and motioned to the band, then began to shimmy as they played "Der Schwarzen Panther." A minute later Professor Unrat joined her on stage, blowing into a saxophone that produced soap bubbles instead of music.

"Isn't she something?" I looked up as Hansie slid into the chair beside Thea. "They say the club's take has tripled since she began performing here."

I snorted. "I don't see how singing 'Koffer in Berlin' is going to improve the lot of starving workers."

"You should see when she passes among the crowd later, after the show—some nights people give her as much as a hundred marks for the cause."

"The cause?" I gave Hansie a dubious look. I saw evidence of no "cause" at the Mooncellar, save unbridled hedonism. But I decided not to waste my time arguing.

We sat and watched Lulu onstage. She was undeniably beautiful, feline in the way she moved and also in a certain, almost inhuman detachment in her lovely dark eyes. I say "inhuman" because that is how a writer of one of Wendigo's pulp novels might describe Lulu, her unsettling combination of female beauty and feckless abandon, the way she invited attention even while displacing it.

Yet, having so recently witnessed Elfi take the stage, I could sense how Lulu's power, and her popularity, must have waned in the weeks or months since Rotwang's truly inhuman creation had come to stand beside her.

Because there was something undeniably fascinating about the fembot, an aura that compelled attention. It was not simply the beauty of her artificial form, the marvelous strangeness of an undeniably feminine likeness that had been poured, like wine, into a glass and steel and wire receptacle. The result, once decanted, seemed to have as intoxicating an effect upon the denizens of the Mondkellar as the beer and champagne on their tables. There was also what I can only call an *intelligence* there, a spark of genuine consciousness or perception. Not the mere posturings and echolalia of an automaton or sophisticated machine, but a responsiveness, even (dare I say it?) a *warmth*—the heat of self-awareness, of cognition and intellect, generated not by the friction of shifting gears and pulsing wires, but by the fembot herself.

(Ah—you see, I have referred to Rotwang's metal construct as "her" and not "it." As I did earlier with Henry Frankenstein's creation, though I profess that I detect no warmth whatsoever in that creature, unless one can consider the heat of loathing and fear to be *warmth*.)

"That girl sure can shimmy," remarked Hansie admiringly. I started, my reverie broken, and looked up to see Lulu slinking across the stage, now wearing an ornately feathered tiara and

not much else. "And she's right, you know—hard to imagine Rotwang's robot doing *that*."

"Or this," retorted Thea. She flounced from her seat, strode to stand before the stage, then did a cartwheel and landed beside Lulu. The two girls looked at each other and began to laugh. Professor Unrat stood and lifted his saxophone toward Thea and Lulu broke into an impromptu Charleston. The crowd roared its approval.

"Ain't she sweet!" said Hansie. He looked at me and winked. "Feel like taking the dance floor, Dora?"

I shook my head. I couldn't tell if drink had so affected him that he took no note of my scars, or if the Moonkellar's overheated atmosphere really did encourage its patrons to overlook such minute flaws as a corpse's pallor, or a metal woman's glowing carapace.

Or, perhaps it is as the French say, "*a chacun a son gout*." "No thank you," I demurred. Hansie grinned to show he'd taken no offense, then turned and grabbed the passing cigarette girl. "How about it, *Puppchen*?"

She had no compunctions, beyond making sure her money was safely on her person, then setting her wares upon the table.

"Be a doll, will you?" she said to me with a wink as Hansie pulled her toward the dance floor. "And watch that till I get back!"

If my answer had been No, she was gone too fast to hear it. I glanced at the cigarette tray, with a grimace picked it up and began to move it to the other side of the table.

"Excuse me, but is this seat taken?"

A small, round-faced man in a dark suit stood, panting slightly, behind the chair Hansie had just vacated. I gave him a noncommittal shrug. He quickly sat, removed his hat, and ran a nervous hand through his hair.

"May I?" He pointed at the cigarette tray. I handed him a cigarette and he lit it, again with a quick, fluttering gesture

that betrayed unease. "Thank you. It is a cold night out, I have been, um, taking the night air and heard the music and recalled I was to meet some friends here but I have not seen them yet . . ."

His words came out in a rush, in a slightly high-pitched, sing-song voice that sounded oddly as though he recited something he'd memorized. He continued to smoke nervously, inhaling then exhaling rapidly. His deepest eyes glanced warily at our surroundings; when he saw me watching him, he forced a smile.

"I have not seen you here before," he said. "To whom do I owe the pleasure, er, the comforting *welcome*, of this table?"

I hesitated, then said, "My friends call me Dora." "Dora, Dora." He repeated the name absently, then looked around once more, still with that same nervous reflex. "A nice name, I knew a little girl once by that name, or was it Nora . . .?"

His voice died; he stared at the stage, not with real interest but as though he had fallen asleep, though with his heavy-lidded eyes still open. He began to whistle soundlessly beneath his breath, then caught himself and glanced aside at me before giving a false laugh and strutting out his cigarette in the ashtray. "Eh, yes, quite a show they put on here, with the metal girl. Not my type, of course, but very talented. Professor Rotwang has quite outdone himself with that one."

"You know Rotwang?" I asked.

The man hunched his shoulders, until he resembled some cornered animal trying to make itself appear smaller. His gaze flickered again, back and forth; his tongue too darted in and out of his mouth.

"Do I know him, do I know him," he repeated as to himself, then hissed. "Yes! Yes, I know him. We have worked together on occasion, he has consulted me a few times, we have shared some thoughts. Some thoughts," he said, underscoring the words by blinking rapidly. "Nothing more. Do you understand?"

And he worked in stealth, and hid the results of his labors. Whereas Rotwang had the courage, at least, to hide his creations in plain sight, and then to display them upon a stage where they could be admired and his ego fed. Here was a man who played at God, but did so in a manner that invited applause for creation, Elfi, was beautiful, acclaimed, talented.

The only thing she was *not*, was human. Hansie had boasted of how much money she collected during and after her performances—a huge sum, in those impoverished days when families scabbled for food in the barren fields, and fathers sold their children to feed themselves.

But what need had a robot of money? And if Elfi's earnings were going straight back to Rotwang—and where else would they go?—to what dire purpose was he applying them?

"... yes, my dear, no need whatsoever to be afraid..." I glanced up to see that my companion still grasped my fingers in his own. His heavy-lidded eyes were almost closed, his lips pursed as he murmured and stared taply, not at me but at someone or something only he could see. He stroked my palm, and just as he traced the bloodless veins that cross my hand, so I could trace the melody in the tune he whistled. He whistled it so softly it was like faint birdsong, if a bird could have been taught the ominous, repetitive notes of Grieg's "In the Hall of the Mountain King."

I shivered then, though not with fear for myself. However improbably strong this little man might be, I knew I could defeat him. And I doubted he would be so foolish as to attack me in such a public place.

But he had attacked other, more vulnerable victims—children, girls—and I knew that, unless apprehended, he would continue to do so.

Yet if I were to turn him over to the authorities now, I would almost certainly lose the opportunity to pursue Rotwang.

and uncover the truth behind his malign deeds—and Henry Frankenstein, I had no idea what had become of my companions Septimus and Cesare, but I feared the worst. If I retained any hope of seeing them again, I would have to track Henry to his lair. And that, I believed, would mean tracking Professor Rotwang to his.

"I am not afraid," I said in a low voice.

The little man blinked. He shook his head as though awakening from a pleasant dream and stared at me uncertainly. The whistle died on his lips. If he were not already so pale he seemed almost bloodless, he might have blanched; instead he looked down at his hand clasping mine, shuddered, then snatched his hand away, as though it had been burned.

"You are very cold, my dear," he said, and forced a smile. "Perhaps you should warm yourself with a hot toddy? May I beckon the waitress for you? I fear I must go, I have an important friend to meet—"

"I would love to meet your friend," I said. My attempt at coyness was mitigated somewhat by how tightly I seized his wrist. "Please—don't leave!"

I smiled. I could tell by the man's horrified expression that his earlier, momentary interest in me had almost immediately turned to genuine repulsion. He had for an instant allowed himself to dream of his helpless victims, only to awaken and find himself in the grip of an Amazon with a corpse's leer and superhuman strength.

"I must go," he hissed. "I *must*—"

I realized then that he must have been about some errand for Rotwang. He had let himself be distracted, first by the girl in the alleyway outside, and then by the Mondkellar's louche charms. The sight of me had been another brief diversion.

Now, however, he had come to his senses. He remembered his task. He would delay no longer.

"Begone!" he cried. His voice rose, shrill as a girl's, as he pulled away from me. "You foul thing, in the name of God, leave me!"

Several patrons turned to look at us. They appeared mildly amused by the scene, but not alarmed—obviously it took more than this to get a rise out of the Mondkellar's jaded clientele.

Still, I doubted I would be able to force this criminal to do my bidding, without bringing down the wrath of the nightclub's manager. And if I let him go, I'd lose the chance to learn if Rotwang's evil plans marched in lockstep with Henry Frankenstein's. It would be difficult, if not impossible, for me to follow the Pfeifer unremarked from this place.

"Release me!" he ordered.

I looked past him to the stage, to where Thea and Lula continued their dance—it had grown increasingly salacious, much to their audience's delight. I wished that Thea had remained at the table with me. She would have had no difficulty in persuading the Pfeifer to stay, I was sure of that.

Reluctantly I loosened my grip upon his sweaty hand. He snatched it back and regarded me balefully, but oddly made no move to flee. Instead, a disquieting smile crept across his sallow features. His heavy-lidded gaze darted between me and the dancers onstage.

"Very pretty," he murmured. His hand slid into the pocket of his overcoat. I tensed, wary that he had a weapon concealed there.

But in the next instant my fears were all blown sky-high. A thunderous crash seemed to split the room in two. Lightning seared the smoky air, followed by utter darkness. Patrons screamed; the jazz band's sinuous version of "Ungarwein" abruptly dissolved into a few rude blats and the clatter of a cymbal falling to the floor. There was an instant of eerie near-silence broken by an odd, high-pitched whistle: the opening bars of "In the Hall of the Mountain King."

Then chain went flying and tables overturned as people stumbled to their feet and attempted to find their way to the door. I reaped gun—not an easy thing to do, as the frantic, frightened rush of people around me seemed out of scale to the size of this very minor disaster—a fuse blown, or maybe it was even part of the act!

But then I heard muffled cries of *Polizeikommissar!* and *Bulldoz!*—and gathered that the place had been raided by the police inspector and vice officer. My impression of Berlin was that no one cared about such things, but perhaps the Mondkellar's liberal management had somehow forgotten to account for that week's bribes. I remained in my chair and clung to the table as though it might support me in a stormy sea.

And then another sound rent the tumult of that lightless space. "Pandora!" Thea's voice echoed from the stage, tremulous at first, then followed by a blood-freezing scream. "Pandora, no—!"

I stumbled to my feet. Beside me someone laughed, a ghastly, half-choked sound. The overhead lights flickered, displaying a cabaret wasteland of fallen tables, upturned chairs, smashed glass, and smoldering cigarettes. People crowded around the room's few doors, cursing and thrusting at each other. On the floor, several customers moaned and struggled to get to their feet.

The lights went out again. The room filled with gasps and frightened cries, but almost immediately the bulbs blazed once more and, this time, continued to cast their bluish glare upon the disarray below. I blinked and got cautiously to my feet.

Of the Pfeifer I saw no sign, nor of anyone who remotely resembled a policeman or vice officer. Onstage, the jazz musicians milled about excitedly. They lit cigarettes and gestured as they hugged their instruments to their chests.

"Lulu!" The saxophonist, a tall man with glasses and springy hair, raced backstage. A moment later he re-emerged.

"She's not there!" he said breathlessly, and began to shout.
 "Lulu! Thea! False alarm, come back!"
 "False alarm, false alarm..."

The words drifted through the club like smoke, and patrons began to return to their tables. A waiter appeared and started to set chairs to rights.

"Hey, thanks—"

I turned, relieved, as someone plucked at my sleeve; but then saw it was only the cigarette girl. She grabbed her tray, gave it a quick once-over to make sure nothing was out of place, then nodded at me. "Really, thanks—the boss don't like me to dance when I'm on duty, he don't like anything that brings sales down..."

"The girl I was with," I broke in quickly. "Thea, Hansie's friend—do you know where she went?"

She shrugged. "No. Didn't see her, but—"

We both turned as Professor Unrat staggered from the stage door. His thin hair stuck up around his face and his clothes were disheveled.

"They're gone!" he cried as the other musicians gathered about him. "Lulu and Thea, I heard them scream—someone's taken them. A deformed woman, I half-saw her as the lights dimmed..."

He looked around wildly. With that terrible premonition I get sometimes in dreams, I knew that his glance would fall upon me. It did.

"Her—" He barely whispered the word as his shaking hand pointed at me. "There, the she-corpse—she was the one brought Thea here. It's her, I'm sure of it!"

Around me, murmurs of excitement. The cigarette girl's eyes widened. For the first time she seemed to really look at me, or perhaps it was that she chose now to see me, colored in the nightmare hues Professor Unrat's tone suggested.

"No!" She locked away from me and bumped into a customer. Cigarettes and cigars and coins went flying, and with them the cigarette girl's much-vaunted concern for her wares. "It was you! I saw you, you took them—"

Now it was my turn to look around wildly, for Hansie or Bernard or even the Pfeifer, anyone who might vouch for my innocence.

But I saw none of them, only Professor Unrat's florid face gazing at me from the stage. He looked fairly transfixed with fear, and I realized he was not lying—he truly believed he had glimpsed me in the darkness.

As did the cigarette girl and, I saw with growing dismay, most of the other residents of the Mondkellar. I knew enough about both the gullibility and suggestibility of crowds to recognize it would be pointless, nay dangerous, for me to protest.

My only hope lay in escape.

"Grab her!" shouted the saxophone player. "Quick!" But no one seemed anxious to grab me. Instead they stared in horror, a horror I couldn't grasp until I heard someone behind me whisper, "The Pfeifer—I heard her when the lights went out, she was whistling—it's her! She's the child murderer!"

"Murderer!"

"Stop her!"

"Block the doors!"

I grasped a chair and hurled it as a group of men rushed toward me, grabbed another chair and used it as a weapon as I fought my way to the door.

It was a futile effort. There were too many people for me to fight. I looked around desperately and shouted Thea's name—and at that moment the room once more went dark.

This time the accompanying screams and shouts were nearly frantic. A wave of pure animal terror buffeted the room, an overpowering fear I was not immune to—it sickened me,

made me feel as though I were once more back in that first conflagration that had nearly taken my life before I had laid claim to it.

"No!" I gasped, tried vainly to find some exit from the mole.

"Thea, please, where are you?"

A terrible weight descended upon me, grasped my arm, and tore me from the darkness. There was a thud, the splintering crash of timbers giving way. Chunks of plaster fell upon me, planks of broken wood and bits of glass. Something dragged me through what had once been a wall. I fought it uselessly. When I opened my mouth to scream, an immense, fetid hand crushed against my face.

"Silence."

The sound of that guttural voice fell upon me like the tolling of an executioner's bell. I pushed at him but the hand only tightened around my nose and mouth, killing my very breath.

"Silence!" the voice repeated, as we stumbled down a black corridor. Only when I gagged did he release his hold upon my face. I choked and gulped for air, but he did not pause as we continued our flight.

So it was that my assailant half-carried, half-dragged me through a torturous labyrinth of halls and tunnels until, at last, we ascended into a tiny chamber lit by a feeble thread of gray light that fell from a crack in the stone walls high above us. Only then did he fling me from him. I fell against the stone wall of my prison, and bared my teeth in a grimace of hatred as I lifted my head to gaze upon the deformed image of my captor—

Frankenstein's monster.

CHAPTER 12

For half a minute I was robbed of speech as he himself had been, once upon a time. I could only stare, fear and rage vying in me as I struggled to find my voice.

Rage won.

"How dare you touch me?" I spat the words and stumbled to my feet. "I am under Dr. Pretorius's protection! You and your master have no power over me—"

"Power?" His voice was a strangled shout, and rage-filled as my own. "I have power over nothing, and no one! I seek power, and—"

Crumbled mortar and flecks of stone showered onto me as he smashed his fist against the wall.

"—I will seize it!" he cried.

I gazed at him, fighting to keep fear—and, yes, twisted admiration—from my expression.

Because, however coarse his voice was, however broken and defiled his corpse's face, at that moment I began to glimpse a sort of nobility in him: a valor that belied his ravaged countenance, a strength of will and what one might call soul, which I had not seen in those earlier moments when I had seen him in Henry Frankenstein's laboratory. The revelation stunned and unnerved me as much as my abduction had.

"You can speak," I said at last.

His eyes glittered with a frozen, terrible fervor.

"I can speak," he agreed. A strange, sad dignity settled upon his broken features, that same gravitas of resignation one sees in a caged tiger or great ape. "The gift was always mine. It

was withheld from me, that is all. I am learning slowly to retain it. To use it; to strengthen it."

As he spoke his voice quavered, an unsettling thing to hear in such a powerful instrument. Not a reed breaking but a great oak. I looked away, ashamed and moved by his emotion.

"Withheld," I said, and returned my gaze to him. "By your creator, you mean—Henry Frankenstein."

He nodded. His face contorted into its more-familiar crouch of brute anger. Again he struck the wall behind me, and this time was rewarded by a rain of broken stone that revealed a gap nearly big enough to climb through. When the air grew still again, and only a haze of dust hung between us, the monster reached for a slab of granite as long as my arm. With one hand he hefted it, lightly as though it had been a bit of balza wood, then smashed it against the wall to make the hole larger. An icy wind stirred through the cell, and I could make out the faint outlines of buildings, the fiful glimmer of a gaslamp.

"He did not create me!" The cell rang with his thunderous voice. "He served merely as a conduit between a lump of dead flesh and the fire of heaven! He would be the New Prometheus, stealing fire from the gods—but he is nothing but a serpent and a groveling thief in the night, a graverobber who seeks to enslave those weaker than himself!"

He turned to me then. The granite slab fell with a crash as he held one hand to me, beseeching. In his eyes burned a flame of something I did not, could not recognize, an emotion I could not bear to look upon. Again I turned away.

"What make of man is it who is so weak that he can only seek his adherents among the dead?" The creature's voice dropped to a rumbling whisper. "What manner of man will struggle to create life, but cannot trust another living thing to control its own thoughts and actions? What kind of creature wishes to enslave or destroy the female of his own kind?"

The face he lifted to me then was not a brute's, but a man's. And his expression held no hatred, no fury; only a blunt plea for an answer, for knowledge I did not possess.

"I—I do not know," I stammered. I felt stupid and clumsy, and my tone seemed to somehow shame the creature. He dropped his head as though I had struck him. The truth was, his words so chastened me that my own response came out broken and harsh as the creature's own first words had been.

"He—he believes us to be monstrous," I went on, struggling to keep my voice even. "And others do as well. Whether that is because they absorb his loathing for us, or whether it is somehow ingrained in them, I do not know."

The creature lifted his great head to meet my eyes. "They do not all loathe us." He pointed at me, and his voice rose in mingled accusation and longing. "They do not all loathe you."

I opened my mouth to reply. He held out his hand to silence me. "They have befriended you, some of them—I have seen this myself. Not just Dr. Pretorius and his companion, but others. Strangers, people you did not know, people who did not flee at the mere sight of you. The forest boys, the woman in the farmhouse, the girl who travels with you and her friends, the people in that damnable place—"

He gestured fiercely at the dark passage whence we had just emerged. For an instant he looked savage and diabolical as he had in the minutes before he destroyed Henry Frankenstein's laboratory. I watched him and my unease again hardened into anger.

"How dare you follow me?" I stooped and grabbed a chunk of granite. My strength was not equal to his, but it was considerable. I took a step backward, toward the hole that gaped onto a black alley; toward freedom. "You pursue me and hold me against my will—you're no better than he is!"

The creature's expression darkened. He stepped toward me and raised his massive hand. I stared at him but did not cower, as my fingers tightened around the stone. Shadows touched his face so that he resembled some ancient, ruined statue. I could not see his eyes, but I felt his breath, cold and raised with the reek of rotting flesh, and heard the dry rattle of air in his throat when he inhaled.

Both things repelled me, as they filled me with disquiet. Was this how others felt at my approach?

And then the creature lowered his arm. A thin shaft of gray light struck his face: his expression was no longer a stone gargoyle's, nor a monster's. A glimpse of a man's countenance shone through again, weary and resigned and sad beyond measure.

"I did not come to harm you," he said in a low voice. "I came to save you."

I sucked in my breath. But not from fear. From astonishment. And shame.

"What do you mean?" I said at last.

"It is a trap. The woman who befriended you—Theresa—they have taken her so as to lure you into a rescue. Their intent is to capture you then practice their terrible art upon you—their vivisection—and so determine the particular dark alchemy that has allowed you to live, while all of their other experiments have perished."

"All others," I repeated. "Save only you."

"Save only me."

"It is Henry Frankenstein, then." It was not a question. "And Rotwang—they are working together?"

"No. Rotwang was indeed once a colleague and fellow-student of Henry Frankenstein's. He is misguided and overzealous, but he truly believes in aiding the workers and underlings of the city."

"But Rotwang has underestimated the ambitions and craft of his creation, the fembot. Her mechanical intelligence has

evolved independently of her creator and now outstrips his own. He gifted her with speech, beauty, reasoning, thought. But he failed to indoctrinate her with any moral sensibility. She is cold—"

As he spoke he bent to grab another granite slab. "Cold and soulless as this stone," he said, and hurled it at the wall. With a muted crack, another section of mortar and rock crumbled. "And as destructive. Rotwang made the mistake of exhibiting the fembot to Henry and his wife before demonstrating it to anyone else. The fembot was a *tabula rasa*. It was a simple thing for Frankenstein to imprint his own malevolent ambitions upon hers."

My arm dropped. The stone slipped from my fingers with a thud as I stared at him in amazement. He stared back, and the echoes of his glottal voice died before I could gather my wits to speak.

"But—how do you know all this?" I finally asked.

"As you noted: I followed you."

"No! What I mean is, how do you *know* this? How is it that you now can speak and reason and act with . . ."

I hesitated, unsure as to how to frame my question; but the creature spoke for me.

"With intelligence? With—humanity?" I thought he would choke upon the word. "It is because I have had months to think upon these things, alone! Because I realized no one would teach me. If I did not want to be a mere animal, hunted to its death, I must teach myself."

"And so I did. Like Rotwang's fembot, I was a *tabula rasa*. But the template for knowledge, for speech and reading and rational argument, was there. The raw mess of organs and sinews could be made to knit so that I could speak and laugh and weep. Electricity fired our limbs, but blood can be forced through them. This body may be a patchwork of

corpses and mangled limbs, but my brain is a single entity.
And it is my own."

He bowed his head as he spoke these last words. Without thinking, almost without will, I found myself stretching out my hand to touch his grotesquely distended brow.

"It is indeed," I said softly.

His eyes flickered so that his gaze met mine. It was not an animal's untroubled stare but a man's—a man's untrammelled by fear or pride or rancor, condescension or the will to subjugate. I had never seen such a gaze before.

And, save in him, I have never seen it since. As I looked at him, he lifted his hand to his brow, so that it rested upon mine.

"Friend," he whispered.

"Yes," I said, my voice breaking. "Friend."
For a minute we stood thus, unspaking. Inside my breast I felt a sudden sharp pulse, a flare of heat as though I had been stabbed.

"Blood," the creature said quietly. A crooked smile crept across his gaunt face. "Your heart has learned it exists, and has a job to do."

From somewhere in the tunnel behind us came muted shouting. The creature straightened. "We should flee," he said. "Not all men are monsters. There are those who would help us. But I will not bear you against your will."

He extended his open hand and said, "Friend. Will you come with me?"

I clasped his hand

"Gladly," I said, and stepped with him toward the opening in the rubble.

CHAPTER 13

We raced through a rank alley so choked we could not run side by side. The roar of pursuit behind us grew louder, voices and, once, the ricochet whine of a gunshot.

"Go," the creature urged, pushing me ahead of him. "Follow this till it ends. I'll keep them at bay."

I ran on, but stopped when the alley opened into a street that had begun to glow blue with dawn. Trash cans and a heap of rusted machinery leaned against the corner of a brick building. I looked back to see the creature some yards behind me, and a small crowd of men. I recognized none of them from the Mooncellar. Some bore torches; one pointed a gun at the creature. With a curse he fired, but once more his shot went wild.

"Don't waste your aim!" a man shouted. He waved a torch, then sprinted in front of his companions. "We want fire to kill it—"

The creature stood in the alley, his back to me. As the man with the torch approached him, I could see the creature's distress grow keener. He waved his arms and grunted, as rage gave way to fear.

"See!" the man shouted gleefully. He feinted with the blazing torch, and thrust it at the creature's head. "I told you, animals are afraid of fire!"

The creature slashed vainly at his attacker, as first one then all of the other men began to circle him. With a roar, he looked over his shoulder at me.

"Go!" he shouted.

I tensed, ready to flee.
But I did not move. Instead I watched as sparks showered upon the creature's face and he confronted his attackers. Not fearlessly—I knew he was afraid, just as I was—and not mindlessly, either. My mind flashed back to those minutes when I first saw him, the conflagration swallowing his stock-blackened figure and the spectral beauty that had clung to him then.

He had survived that—he had survived death, more than once. He now defied it again, in order to save me.

"Go!"

His voice shook the crumbling walls to either side of us. I bent, grasped a rusted girder, and ran to his side.

"Leave him!" I shouted. I swung the girder. It smashed into the head of the man with the torch and he fell, swiftly and silently as if he had been made of wax. I swung again, struck a second man and then a third who dropped with screams of pain, before their more fortunate companions started to back away.

"Pandora."

I stood, panting, as the crowd broke and the men turned to race back whence they'd come. It was only after the creature had spoken my name for the third time that I looked up, dazed.

"Come," he said. He gently took my fingers and pried the rusted metal from them. "I too have made friends. They will help us."

The dawning city woke around us as we hurried through still-dark side streets, past alleys where the odd reveler staggered and a trio of chilled-looking boot girls made a last stand before trudging home after their night's work. Vendors and farmers hauled their wares to market in horse-drawn carts. A few shopkeepers swept the sidewalks in front of their doors, leaving

small little piles of refuse on the curbs; broken bottles, sausage-rinds, French loaves. The smells of coffee and frying meat and cabbage spilled from workmen's restaurants and tenements, mingled in their jobs and the clamor of train engines rent the early morning silence.

And so it was that, as sunrise began to spill from above the city's buildings, a different Berlin emerged, one more suitable to its daytime residents—orderly, hardworking, slightly shabby; exhausted perhaps but still putting on a brave show of energy and diligence and what seemed a genuine, if perhaps misguided, optimism. In my soiled, torn clothes, with my companion marooned above me, I felt more than ever as though I had been Prometheus and Cesare, and felt a stab of fear as I thought of them, abducted by those human or inhuman vipers I'd seen at the Mooncellar.

"Here—" We crossed a canal and turned down Furbringergrasse, where the creature gestured clumsily at a small lodging-house. "We will find them inside."

I followed him to a side door, where he knocked as quietly as he could—the sound still sounded dangerously loud. I looked around anxiously, but saw no one save a yawning man walking a dachshund. The creature knocked again, more urgently this time, and the door cracked open.

"Yes!" An eye appeared in the gap. I heard a snort of laughter, and then the door abruptly swung open. "Why, hallo! Smith! What in god's name are you doing here at this hour?"

I stared blankly at my companion. "Smith?"

The monster opened his mouth, but before he could speak our host exclaimed, "Well, quick then, come in, come in before Frau Gunther hears you! This way, watch your head—yours too, Fraulein—"

We stepped hastily inside. The door closed, someone took my elbow and steered me down a sunlit corridor to where a door opened onto a small apartment. Behind me my companion's heavy tread made the floorboards shake.

"For god's sake, Christopher, you'll bring the entire house down!" a deep voice exclaimed peevishly from the room as the three of us entered. "I promised her there'd be no more guests, not today anyway. 'I promised her there'd be no more guests, not today anyway, not before 7 A.M., anyway! What are you thinking?'"

The voice died as Christopher closed the apartment door behind us. "Sorry, Wystan," he said. "Unexpected guests, a bit difficult to turn them away unremarked."

"I can see that," said Wystan dryly.

The room around us was filled with a fog of cigarette smoke. Rumpled blankets covered a single bed; there were books stacked everywhere, and piles of paper, coffee cups full of pens and pencils and plates covered with cigarette ash and the remains of half-eaten meals. A tidy desk with a typewriter stood beneath one window; a second, larger, far less tidy desk with another typewriter stood beneath the other.

"Sorry for the mess, Smith," Christopher said, and cleared a coffee-stained manuscript from a chair. "Please, tell your lady friend to have a seat."

He shot me a grin. A short, athletic young man in his twenties, he had a round, handsomely youthful face. Cleft chin, frank eyes, shiny brown hair that flopped over a high forehead and made him look even more like an oversized boy. One of Wendigo's crew, perhaps, grown up and away from their woodland haven, his Indian attire traded for a tidy sweater and trousers. His friend, Wystan, was roughly the same age, but taller and wore a rumpled tweed jacket; fair-haired, jug-eared, not as handsome but possessing a barely checked, nearly manic energy that made the small room seem even more packed than it was.

"Yes, sir," he drawled, and kicked the chair toward me. "You're English," I said in surprise.

"We are citizens of the world," Wystan corrected me gravely. "Water-citizens," Christopher added. He indicated the stained manuscript beside his typewriter. "I'm writing a film script."

"Peev-citizen," said Wystan, pointing at his head. Behind him, Henry Frankenstein's creature peered out the window, then drew the curtain. "Smith, stop that—you're making me nervous. You and Christopher. Every time the bell rings, he thinks it's the police, come to collect us and send us back to London."

"Why?" I looked at them curiously. They didn't appear to be criminals—if anything, they seemed far more ordinary than most of the people I'd encountered in the last few weeks, except for their utter lack of fear or disgust at the presence of their two uninvited guests.

Christopher sighed. "Let's just say that not everyone is as open-minded as your friend Smith. Especially in England."

I frowned. "Why do you call him Smith?"

"It's a joke," said Wystan. He smiled, and to my astonishment, a small, answering smile creased the monster's face. "We know Baron Frankenstein, Christopher and me—Henry bashed around London for a while, before returning here to his home ground. An insufferable cad—"

"A total prick, really," broke in Christopher. "Trades on his title. Always cadging money."

"Let's just say he's a bad lot," said Wystan. "Toffs it up for the ladies, then when they're not looking kicks stray dogs in the alley. After killing them first and dissecting them, of course. Which I gather is how he's spending his time back here in Berlin, only now he's grown tired of man's best friend and styles himself a scientist."

"A real ladykiller," said Christopher.

I cleared my throat. "Smith?"

"Ah, yes, Smith! Well, a man needs a name, doesn't he?" said Wystan. He lit a cigarette and absently began tapping the ashes into the pocket of his tweed jacket. "Well, Henry has made a big show of styling himself the 'New Prometheus'—you know, heroically stealing fire from the gods, that sort of thing. Meanwhile, here's our friend—"

He gestured fondly at the monster. "A decent type trying to educate himself—that's how we met, you know, he came to us for tutoring in English—doing the best he can, with his hands scarred from the fire and his clothes still reeking of cold ashes. I suppose I had the whole Greek metaphor in mind because of Henry's blathering on about himself. Anyhow, one day I was sitting with our friend and it just struck me. 'Hephaistos!' I thought—that's who he is. You know, forger of Zeus's thunderbolts, blacksmith to the gods, etcetera, etcetera. A nice classical reference to counter Henry's claims."

"Bit of a mouthful in the schoolyard, though," said Christopher. "I mean, not that our friend's exactly a lad, but it's a difficult name to wrap your tongue around, Hephaistos. 'Smith,' I thought, that's more like it—you know, Hephaistos being a blacksmith and all. It's a good solid name, Smith, no nonsense there. Easy to remember. Easy to spell, too," he added with a glance at the monster. "We've got to get back to work on that, right, friend?"

"Hephaistos?" I shook my head, marveling. "But that's so strange! Because my creator—Septimus Pretorius, perhaps you know of him—his friend and companion Cesare gave me the name Pandora. And Cesare told me that, in the oldest version of the legend, it was Hephaistos who created Pandora."

I turned to stare at the monster in wonder. At the same time, both Christopher and Wystan looked at me, their own surprised expressions mirroring my own.

"Why, I should have seen it—you're Septimus's woman!" Wystan exclaimed. "The one he lost, the one he's been tearing up Berlin for?"

"You know Dr. Pretorius?" I said.

"Know him?" Wystan laughed and clapped his hand on his knee, sending up a pall of cigarette ash. "Why, he was my biology tutor! A dear, dear friend—I've known him for years!"

Christopher nodded. "And I knew Cesare—I was the one introduced him to Septimus, and helped them to develop their somnambulist act. I wrote the script—one of my first efforts."

"I should have seen it earlier," said Wystan. He looked me up and down, stroking his chin thoughtfully. "It's your hair—it's different."

I touched my head. "The fire burned much of it away. I cut it afterward."

"Well, this is a fortunate fall." Wystan stubbed out his cigarette and paced briskly across the room. "Because Septimus and Cesare are here, in Berlin."

"They are?" Of course I should not have been taken aback—everyone ends up in Berlin, eventually. "But where?"

"They're in hiding. They've been searching frantically for you, Pandora, but it's been difficult—Frankenstein's done everything he can to pin the blame for his murders on Septimus. He's got deep pockets, as I'm sure you know, and a little gold goes a long way these days."

"And Henry talks a good line," said Christopher. "People gather to hear him, he throws a bit of money their way, a few vague promises—and Hey presto! You have a crowd of vigilantes screaming for blood, all looking for someone to blame for their troubles. Hatred and fear make a good sauce for hunger and poverty and unemployment. It's not much to feed on, but starving people will take whatever they're offered."

"And now Henry has Rotwang's machine on his side as well," added Wystan. "The fembot. She's gained quite a reputation in the more Bohemian parts of town—she entertains in the kinds of places some of our friends frequent."

"She's good, too," said Christopher frequently.
 "She's good, and she's clever," Wystan agreed. "More clever by half than Rotwang was. His plans were altruistic—misguided but good-intentioned. He wanted the fembot to lead the Frankenclasses in revolt. But the fembot has allied herself with the Mondkellar and his wife—the money she earns at places like there into his laboratory."

"How do you know all this?" I demanded. I looked at the monster—I still could not bring myself to call him Smith. He had remained silent during all this, but now he stepped into the center of the room, his great ungainly form nearly blotting out the small windows.

"They know because they have been working with Septimus," he said. "As have I."

"But—where is he?" I asked brokenly. I looked around the room as though he might be hiding behind the stacks of paper and books. "It sounds as though everyone knows, save me."

"They're with Rotwang," said Wystan. He lit another cigarette, gnawed at his thumb for a moment before continuing. "He and Cesare—both of them have been lying low there."

"And the others? The Children of Cain?"

"You mean his little freak show?" said Christopher with affection. "Oh yes. All present and accounted for."

I brought my hand to my mouth. My eyes stung; I blinked, touched my face, then drew my hand back to stare at something glistening on my fingertips.

Tears.

I had never cried before. I caught myself, ashamed and slightly embarrassed, but then the guttural voice of Frankenstein's creation reached beside me.

"Do not weep, Pandora." He stooped to rest his huge hand upon my cheek. "It is as he says: they are alive."

"But—how?"

"Oh, they ran into some friends along the road," said Wystan with an offhand wave. "You know how it is. But listen—"
 He turned and began to gather a few things—overcoat, scarf, cigarettes—halted, and glanced back at me. "Aren't you cold?"
 I shrugged. "Not really. The cold doesn't bother me as much as it does other people. And I don't really tire, either."

"Good." Wystan nodded approvingly.
 With a flourish, Christopher stepped over to hand me a heavy wool cloak.

"Here, I know, I know—not very fashionable. But you're a bit of a mess." He inclined his head at my torn dress and now badly soiled tuxedo jacket. "Not that it bothers me in particular, but we don't want to draw any more attention to ourselves than we have to. And there's certainly not much we can do to disguise Smith here. So you put this cloak on over your clothes, Pandora, and we'll head for Rotwang's. It's a walk, but you look as if you've done enough of that of late that it shouldn't be too much of a challenge."

He winked, and I took the cloak and pulled it on. As I did, I felt a weight rest upon my shoulder, and looked up to see Frankenstein's creature patting the cloth awkwardly.

I could not help it: I flinched. As I did, his ruined face contorted. He yanked away his immense hand without meeting my eyes, but I saw the pain in his, as he turned and stumbled to the door.

"We go," he said. Hurt, and anger, blunted his speech. "Now."

The four of us made an odd group as we hurried from the lodging house into Furbringerstrasse and on past the canal

and rail station, until we came upon one of the myriad paths that snaked through the city. Wystan loped along with his long hands and wrists extending from his overcoat, smoking and talking excitedly, and occasionally poking at a bit of trash with his large furled umbrella. At his side, Christopher kept pace like an overgrown, slightly unruly schoolboy, one who knew by name many of the streets' more unavory denizens—beggars, prostitutes, black marketeers trading in tobacco and foreign currency and turnips—though he seemed to be taking care not to greet them and thus draw unwanted attention to the creature and myself.

And indeed, we received only a passing glance from most of those we encountered. Whether this was due to the hour—it was still not yet seven in the morning of a winter's day—or the jaded nature of the Berliners themselves, I cannot say.

Whatever the case, two energetic Englishmen and a pair of walking corpses raised nary an eyebrow amongst the passing citizens.

"Mind the path, it gets a bit mucky this time of year," Wystan warned as he led us from the street onto a gravel path that led into the park. "There hasn't been money to maintain this particular patch of greenery."

"Personally, I think Rotwang prefers it that way," said Christopher. "Harder to find him, easier to disappear if the need arises..."

Wystan nodded. "Which, inevitably, it does."

I had often heard that Berlin was a green city, bounded by parks and pastoral enclaves. When I imagined what it would be like, I had imagined something resembling the small, sorry village green in Dr. Pretorius's township—a grassy sward given over to weeds and struggling wildflowers, with perhaps a few saplings or a single ancient oak that would give shade during a more amicable season than winter.

But the parks I had glimpsed in my admittedly brief and nervous tour of Berlin were not pastoral (if overgrown) idylls of the sort at all.

Instead the parks were unmanicured expanses of trees, dotted with lakes and ponds, overgrown with thickets of brush and woods of dank evergreens; as though the surrounding city, it was easy to see why Berlin's Wild-boys had adopted these hidden places as their refuge, and easy too to imagine how easy it must have been for Wendigo and his tribe to adapt from living in the city to roughing it on the banks of a cold black-running river, with the works of Algernon Blackwood and Zane Gray as their guides.

This park—the one Wystan now hacked his way through with his umbrella, as though it were a machete—might have been a forest primeval, plucked from the pages of one of Wendigo's pulp novels. Huge evergreens towered above us, their matted needles so dark a green they seemed black against the early evening sky. Underfoot, fallen branches snagged my legs; a few feet behind me, the creature stumbled often and lashed out furiously whenever he did. I heard faint scurrings, and, once, a howl that sounded less like a dog than a wolf.

Wystan and Christopher seemed to find their way with no problem—they hardly seemed to notice where they were, and continued without interruption a long conversation about a film they had seen recently at a movie house in Alexanderplatz. Now and then one of them would pause to look back at us, or call out a cheery "Still there?"

But once I'd answered—the creature remained silent, though he radiated a simmering anger—our guides would head onward, deeper and deeper into the woods.

The park seemed endless. I felt more uneasy there, than in any place I had been since my flight from Dr. Pretorius's

house. Ice crackled beneath my shoes where patches of stagnant water had frozen. Unseen things moved in the branches overhead, and occasionally their voices startled me—a shriek like a frightened woman, mured growls, a disquieting sound like a barely suppressed sigh. Once, we passed a stone circle that held the remains of a fire. A few gnawed bones were scattered around its perimeter, and I again thought of Wendigo and his tribe camped beside the banks of a black river.

But after some time, I sensed a change in the woods around us. The trees appeared dark and thick as ever, but now they seemed somehow watchful, prescient. I felt as though we were being observed, though I still could not catch a glimpse of anything so much as a squirrel. The distinct smell of scorched metal overpowered the scents of spruce and leaf-mold, and caused the creature to draw up alongside me, his ruined features mirroring my own unease.

"Fire," he said. He grabbed a sapling thick around as my leg and snapped it in two. "There are men nearby."

I could see nothing that hinted of human habitation. Still, not far ahead of us Wystan and Christopher trekked on, smoking and conversing amiably and with no apparent care, as if they were still in their lodging house and not this ominous forest.

"Not too much farther now," Wystan called back at us cheerfully.

I saw no trail. But Wystan strode without hesitation through the underbrush. He seemed to find a path where none existed, like Theseus following Ariadne's clew. When the thickets grew impenetrable, he would lightly tap a briar hedge with the tip of his umbrella, and suddenly an opening would appear, through which even the monster could pass unimpeded.

"There," said Wystan after another quarter-hour. He paused, Christopher at his side, and pointed to a dark patch a few yards ahead of us. "See?"

I squinted but saw nothing save the ragged outline of a larger hedge, its upper branches thatched with dead leaves and abandoned birds-nests. Christopher took in my blank stare and laughed.

"I know—it's impossible, really. I never know how he does it. Step a bit closer, here, beside me."

I walked to join him, the monster lumbering behind me. As I did, Christopher grasped my hand and pointed at the top of the hedge, where a thin rind of slate-gray sky gleamed.

"See that bit of sky there?" he said. "Look just beyond it. Try not to focus, I find that works best."

I blinked, keeping my gaze fixed upon the patch of sky; until as though a curtain had risen, the trees seemed to fall away and I found myself staring at a small ramshackle house, slate-shingled with a thatched roof, tucked disconcertingly between two larger, windowless buildings in an alarming state of disrepair.

"The forest grew around them," explained Christopher. "I believe Rotwang somehow *encouraged* it to grow—you know, like training a vine to climb a dead tree."

"Science," intoned Wystan somberly. "The mysteries of the universe have yet to be plumbed. Mind you don't trip on those rocks."

He hurried on. Christopher waited for the creature and myself. "You'll have to be careful getting in the front door, Smith," he warned. "Not really designed for someone your size."

It was like the crooked house in the English nursery rhyme, tinged with a faint malevolence and that strong odor of overheated metal. Scraps of twisted iron were scattered near the entrance, like the leavings of some mad blacksmith; also broken glass, shattered alembics and test tubes, coils of wire and electrical transformers. I wondered why the roof hadn't caught ablaze and, indeed, when I looked up I saw

places where the thatch was singed or, in one spot, completely burned away.

"Fire," the monster repeated. His voice broke. I turned and saw, to my astonishment, that he was trembling. "Fire kills, Pandora—don't. Don't go inside."

"Nonsense," said Wystan. He loped up the cracked steps and rapped insistently on the door with his umbrella. "Fire kills houses inside. You'll see."

As he spoke, a slate toppled from the wall above him and fell with a crash onto the stone steps, where it shattered. "Rotwang!" yelled Christopher. "Let us in, damn it, your house is disintegrating!"

With a grating creak, the front door suddenly swung open. A slight man with wild hair and equally wild eyes half-hidden by tinted spectacles scowled out at us.

"Wystan," he said gruffly. "And Christopher. Why didn't you knock?"

"I did," said Wystan. He did so again, and sent another loose slate crashing to the ground.

Rotwang kicked it aside, looked up, and saw myself and the creature. For a moment his scowl deepened. Then recognition and amazement caused him to slap his forehead and let out a shout.

"Septimus! By god, Septimus, come quick!"

From inside the crooked house came muffled thumps and the clatter of footsteps. Moments later a second figure stood beside Rotwang, wearing a stained laboratory jacket, his white hair in disarray and his hands clad in thick black rubber gloves.

"Pandora!" he gasped. Behind him Cesare appeared, his lab coat the twin of Pretorius's.

In the flurry of excited greetings that followed, Wystan and Christopher stepped inside with Rotwang. I withdrew from Dr. Pretorius's embrace and fell into Cesare's, only to have him suddenly pull away.

"My sister." He looked past me to Henry Frankenstein's creature. "Thea—where is she? I had hoped she'd be with you . . ."

"No," I hesitated, then took a step toward the monster and let my hand rest fleetingly upon his great arm. "She's been kidnapped. By Rotwang's creation, the robot Elfi."

"The fembot," Cesare's expression hardened, and his face grew pale. "It is as we feared."

I nodded, and glanced up at the creature's grim face. "But you need have no fear of him—he came to my aid, when the fembot and Henry's followers would have captured me as they did Thea."

"That's right," Christopher slipped between us to the door, pulled it closed, and drew the bolt. "Smith here risked his own skin, such as it is, to rescue Pandora and bring her to us for safekeeping."

Cesare raised an eyebrow "Smith?"

"Come quickly!" broke in Dr. Pretorius. He linked one arm through mine and the other through the creature's. "We have no time to waste—now that most of our little family has been reunited, we must do our best to find those who are still in danger."

"And not just Thea," he added, and directed us to follow him. "And not just us. A number of women disappeared from the Mondkellar last night at the same time Thea did. And another child has gone missing, from the street adjoining the club."

"How do you know all this?" There was a note of accusation in the monster's basso voice, and I became suddenly aware of how he towered protectively beside me.

Dr. Pretorius raised his hands placatingly. "Cesare is close friends with the Mondkellar's hat girl. She telephoned to say she'd seen Pandora at the club, then rang again a short while later to warn us that there'd been a disturbance."

"That was when we learned that other women had disappeared." Cesare's already pale face went dead-white. "I had hoped my sister was with you..."

He broke off and turned away, then slumped against the wall. Christopher and Wytan took him by the shoulders and carried him to a sofa, where they set him down gently.

"Cesare!" Dr. Pretorius hurried to sit beside him. He laid a hand upon the unconscious Cesare's brow, then shook his head gravely. "He has been poorly these last few weeks, with worry for his sister and yourself. The task of caring for the children has fallen to him as well—"

"Where are they?"

Dr. Pretorius gave me a wan smile. "They are safe. And they will be very glad to see you, Pandora—but not yet. Rotwang has hidden them in a wing of the house, lest they be discovered if we are laid siege. The rest of us might escape or fight our way to freedom, but they are small and vulnerable and would fall easy prey to Frankenstein and his tuggish army."

I shivered, and tried not to think of the fate that would surely await those fragile, grotesque creatures if they should fall into Frankenstein's hands. Death—or, worse, vivisection, their small lives snuffed out and their imps' bodies stuffed into laboratory jars or vitrines.

The thought sickened me. My emotions must have been evident: I felt a powerful hand descend upon my shoulder, there to rest tentatively.

"They will come to no harm," the creature pronounced in a low voice. "I give you my word. I will guard them with my life. As I will you."

I fought the urge to push him away; to flinch or fight him off. Instead I drew a deep breath, and nodded.

"Thank you." The words came with an effort, but I meant them. "I will do the same for you—for everyone in this room."

I looked at Dr. Pretorius beside Cesare's prone form, at Wytan and Christopher where they stood in muted, earnest conversation with Dr. Rotwang in a corner. Finally I lifted my face to the creature beside me.

"Especially for you. Smith..." I hesitated, "Friend."

"Friend." He smiled. "Yes—friend."

Behind me Wytan's voice rose. "Are you sure of that?" I turned to see Wytan questioning Rotwang intently. The wild-haired man nodded.

"Well, if what you say is true, we're wasting our time here." Wytan glanced at Christopher. "Rotwang here claims they've gathered in the *Unterstadt*—the Undercity. Elfi showed them the way in. Frankenstein and his wife have taken over Rotwang's old medical facility."

Christopher blanched. "Are you sure?"

"Steady there, old friend." Wytan tapped Christopher with the umbrella, then shot me a look. "A touch of claustrophobia, that's all. Bad experience in a damp basement when he was young. One of these days he'll get treatment for it."

"One of these days I'll go someplace warm and sunny and stay there," Christopher said through gritted teeth. He turned to me and explained, "The *Unterstadt*'s immense—it stretches beneath all of Berlin. Homeless workers and their families took shelter there after the war, and hundreds of them remained."

"I was striving to help them," said Rotwang. "To organize and educate them, so that they could return to the daylight world and take their place among the workers here. That was my dream—I developed Elfi as a prototype, to take over the sort of difficult manual labor that the impoverished have too long struggled with. We would visit the *Unterstadt* to lecture the workers there."

He sighed and ran a hand through his thicker of unruly hair. "All went very well until Elfi began to develop her own ideas. I did my job too well."

"Occupational hazard," said Wystan kindly. "Septimus has the same problem."
He glanced at the sofa. Cesare had revived and was sitting upright with Dr. Pretorius at his side.

"I think you'd better go on without me," the somnambulist said. "I'd just slow you down."

"Nonsense," said Dr. Pretorius, but I could see concern clouding his eyes. "We can help you—"

"I'll stay with him," Christopher hastened to join the two of them. "I can handle a gun. And we don't want to leave Septimus's little menagerie behind. Or Cesare."

Wystan frowned. "That will only leave five of us to find Thea." "And to confront Elfi," said Rotwang. He looked from Septimus to Frankenstein's creature, and finally at me. "Five against Frankenstein and his wife and their undead women; five against Elfi and whatever workers she has entranced or enslaved; five against the murderous Pfeifer—and with Thea's welfare at stake, and Lulu's."

"Among many others," agreed Dr. Pretorius.

"Well, there were only Seven against Thebes," observed Wystan. "And they were up against Theseus."

"I don't know as that's the best comparison to make," said Dr. Pretorius. "Considering how it ended. But I think Christopher's right. He should remain here with Cesare. They have weapons. The house is solid enough to withstand a brief siege. My thought is that, either way, things will end quickly."

I glanced at the creature beside me. "That doesn't sound much more encouraging than Wystan's remark."

"Perhaps not," said Dr. Pretorius thoughtfully. "But remember, in Euripides' version of the play, the children of the Seven took vengeance upon the Thebans and destroyed their city."

Beside me, the creature gave an impatient grunt.

"We fight," he said. "Frankenstein die."

"Nicely put," Dr. Pretorius smiled, then crossed to join Cesare and Christopher. "Goodbye, dear friends . . ."

His voice dropped as he bent his head to bid them farewell, as I could not hear his words. But for the first time, it seemed to me that my creator showed signs of genuine doubt and unease. His leave-taking was undeniably emotional: I saw him blink away tears, and Cesare clasped his hand a long time before at last Dr. Pretorius turned away. Wystan and Christopher's farewell, equally poignant, was truncated by Rotwang's worried insistence that we depart.

I felt a pang, of sympathy but also fear. Until this moment, much of the last few weeks had seemed to pass as a sort of troubled dream—disturbing, yes, but not quite real to me.

Now, however, the risks and potential losses entailed by our undertaking seemed far too visceral. The relief I'd felt at finding Dr. Pretorius and Cesare alive was countered by the dreadful thought that they might soon be lost to me forever.

And Thea might already be dead.

"Hurry!" urged Rotwang. He beckoned us to follow him down a dark corridor, Wystan at his side with furled umbrella to the ready. "Henry has a good two hours' head start on us. It will be nearly an hour before we reach him—and that's assuming we don't run into trouble on the way. I've pinpointed exactly which level of the Unterstadt he's adopted as his laboratory and assembly area. He's had more than enough time now to gather his forces. I dread the thought of what we will find when we get there."

The creature—Smith, I reminded myself—stooped to follow Dr. Pretorius and me into the hall.

"Then why are we going?" he demanded, his sepulchral voice booming through the passage.

"We have no choice." I was shocked by how dispirited Dr. Pretorius sounded; not just resigned but hopeless. "He has

Thea—our friend. Our *family*. One doesn't abandon family to the likes of Henry Frankenstein."

Ahead of us, Rotwang darted into a side passage. Wytan paused to make sure we'd seen the way. Then he too disappeared, leaving Dr. Pretorius and Smith and myself for a moment alone.

"She is not my friend," retorted Smith. "And I have no family."

Dr. Pretorius stared at him, dumbstruck, then abruptly drew himself to his full, not inconsiderable height, eyes ablaze, so that he resembled a windblown and affronted heron.

"No family?" he cried. The hopelessness that had clung to him moments before burned away in this sudden show of passionate resolve. "No friends? Who are *we*, if not your family! Who am I, if not the one who gave birth to you, and who is *she*—"

He poked me with a bony and very sharp finger. "*—who is Pandora, if not your friend! Nay, more than friend—your soul-mate, for who besides Pandora can truly understand your own nature? Who better than Pandora to enter the underworld with you now, and find there perhaps a better world—not just find one, but perhaps even to *found* one, to create one—to bring a new and truly modern world into being?*"

Smith looked taken aback and uncharacteristically grave, as Pretorius's words died into silence and our creator gazed at both of us challengingly, as though expecting a reply. I stared back, but after a moment stole a look at Smith.

To my chagrin, I found him gazing now at *me*. I looked away, then caught myself.

"No," I said in a low voice. I forced myself to face Smith again. "Dr. Pretorius is right. We are your family. I—I am your family. Your *friend*. Not by birth, or force of circumstance, but by choice. Just as I chose Thea, and Cesare, and the Children of Cain. *They* may act differently—"

I gestured fiercely at the wall, indicating the world beyond. "Frankenstein and his like—men. *And* women. *They* may

hate us and hunt us and kill us. But not all humans are like them, any more than Elf is like you, or me. That is why I will go now and find Thea and help her—help whomever Henry Frankenstein has taken prisoner. There is always a choice, and this is mine."

I stopped, and saw Dr. Pretorius gazing at me with pride and, yes, the glint of tears in his eyes.

"Well said, Pandora," he murmured.

He clasped my hand, drew it to his lips, and kissed it; then hurried after Rotwang and Wytan into the side passage. I stood, silent, in the hall with Smith.

"There are so few of us," I said at last, and hated the way my voice faltered as I spoke. "Your strength would be a great asset. But I would not compel you to come with us. Even if I could," I added, and gave him a wry smile.

He said nothing. I stood awkwardly in the still corridor, and finally turned to follow the others.

"Wait." Smith's great hand closed around my wrist, but gently. "Perhaps because I am a man, not a woman, I have more experience than you of the evil men can do."

As he withdrew his hand, I looked down to see the scars massed upon his arm. Not scars like my own, which are evidence of creation, but the terrible results of his near-fatal encounters with flame. I thought of Prometheus stealing fire, and of how Smith had been consumed by the conflagration, not once but twice.

"You do indeed," I said softly. I let my fingers rest tentatively upon his arm, his skin cold as granite. "I would not blame you for leaving now."

"No," he said. He straightened, and his head grazed the ceiling. "I will go with you—with all of you. Even if it means confronting the fire for the last time. Better to brave Hell with true companions, than Heaven with false ones."

He looked down at me and smiled. His grave face was not beautiful, but at that moment I would rather have gazed upon its stern, ravaged lines than upon any carven Adonis of marble or gold.

"Come then," I said, and took his hand. "Let's go find our friends."

CHAPTER 14

The passage was dimly lit by old-fashioned gas lamps that threw a feeble gleam across the stone floor and walls. It wound back and forth like one of the switchback roads that traverse the mountains, only instead of going up it led indisputably down. The weight of the entire city seemed to press upon us, along with a fetid heat more suitable to a tropical manse than Berlin in winter.

"Here they are."

I heard Wystan's terse voice not far ahead of us. A minute later the corridor doubled back on itself yet again, and Smith and I were once more face to face with our companions. Rotwang's anxious expression turned to relief when he saw I was accompanied by Smith. Wystan smiled and reached to shake Smith's hand.

"Thanks for casting your lot with us, old man. Levels the playing field somewhat."

Dr. Pretorius simply beamed.

"Is it much farther?" I asked.

Rotwang drew an enormous keyring from a pocket, his wild hair sending ragged shadows dancing up and down the walls. "Far? We're headed into the very bowels of Berlin, if you're not too dainty for such a metaphor. But to get there, we first have to pass through my own private labyrinth—part of it, anyway."

He held up a key then thrust it into what appeared to be solid stone. As though slicing into moist cake, the key slid into some hidden lock. Rotwang leaned forward and pushed, indicating that the rest of us should join in. We did so, straining

until Smith took over, and, with one solid shove from his massive hands, the entire wall slid aside to reveal a vast room.

"Good heavens, Rotwang!" exclaimed Dr. Pretorius. "You've got a veritable Aladdin's den in here!"

"Or Bluebeard's," Wystan glanced at me, winked, then stepped inside.

"My laboratory," announced Rotwang with assumed modesty, suspension, temporal dissolution and recovery, anti-matter. A few little forays into splicing human brain cells into robotic lobes. You know how difficult it is to find time these days to devote to what one really cares about.

"Indeed I do," said Dr. Pretorius. "But you've done wonders with the place."

The lab stretched into shadows, seemingly endless. Wires and tubes and electrical apparatus ornate as Fabergé eggs were everywhere, along with dusty tables full of metal limbs, glass vials, and bulbs. A gurney was shoved against one wall, covered with hands made of platinum and crystal. Shelves built into another wall held scores of robotic heads, eyeless, mouthless, wires trailing from their ears and nostrils. In the room's center, a sort of raised dais held a chair like a throne, where a crystalline form identical to Elfi's sat. I started, thinking for a moment that this was the renegade fembot who had abducted Thea.

But this figure was absolutely motionless and, if anything, possessed an even greater spectral beauty than Elfi herself. Even so I approached her cautiously, as did Smith and Wystan and Dr. Pretorius.

"Elfi was only a prototype." There was a hint of real grief in Rotwang's tone. "I put everything into her, you know—too much, maybe—everything except a moral compass. I gave her a sense of what was right, but neglected to give her a sense of what was *wrong*. I didn't make that mistake with this one."

He reached to stroke the fembot's silver face, its strange shuttered eyes and lipless mouth. "I gave this one knowledge of Evil—introduced her to the seven deadly sins. An entire crash course in Vice. We'll see how she does. Assuming, of course, we have the opportunity."

Rotwang's hand lingered for a few more seconds. Then he turned and headed for the far wall.

"Once we step through that door, we leave my little kingdom and enter Henry Frankenstein's," he said, and ducked through a small opening. The rest of us followed. Smith last of all.

"It's a kingdom Frankenstein usurped from the poor who were living there first," said Dr. Pretorius.

Wystan shrugged. "That doesn't make it any less his, especially now that he and the wife have moved in. Eminent domain and all that."

I grimaced, wondering what sort of person would want to seize this darkness as his domain. The passage was so cramped we could not walk abreast, and so low-ceilinged that Smith and Wystan and Pretorius had to proceed nearly doubled. Rotwang produced an electric torch, so that we had a thread of light to follow but no more.

The air grew hot and foul, with a graveyard taint. I marveled that the stench of corpses could so distress me—and Smith, too, as I could see—when I myself had so recently been one of them. Wystan grimaced and cursed, and more than once held a handkerchief to his nose. Only Dr. Pretorius and Rotwang seemed immune to the scent.

The tunnel wound deeper and deeper beneath the city. It was like boring into the heart of a malign chambered nautilus. I could see nothing save the faint glow of Rotwang's torch; I feel nothing but stone beneath my feet and to my sides; breathed nothing save that poisonous air; and heard nothing save the breathing of my companions, an occasional muffled

curse from Wystan, and Smith's angry grunt when he had difficulty squeezing through a turn in the passage. But gradually the darkness began to diminish. Ahead of us, Rotwang halted and switched off his torch.

"Listen," he whispered.

"What?" I demanded, but he held up a warning finger. We listened. At first I could hear nothing but Dr. Pretorius fighting to catch his breath. Then another sound seemed to creep into the passage with us—a thin, plaintive ghost of a sound, no less terrible for being almost impossible to hear.

"The Whistler," breathed Wystan.

And yes, faint as the sound was, I recognized the same tune I'd heard when the lights went out in the Mondkellar: "In the Hall of the Mountain King."

"It's him," I whispered.

Smith's hand closed around mine. He drew me to his side and murmured, "Do not fear, Pandora." Despite his attempt to speak gently, his voice echoed through the corridor.

"Shhh!" said Rotwang, and peered into the shadows. Smith gave him a hostile look.

"They thought it was me," I explained quickly, before my companions could argue. "Back when the lights failed in the Mondkellar—I heard the Pfeifer whistling in the dark. Everyone heard him; but then someone accused *me* of being the child murderer. That was when I fled."

"Good move," said Wystan dryly.

"She had no choice," rumbled Smith. Just in front of us, Dr. Pretorius lifted a warning finger.

"Listen!" he hissed.

The whistling continued, but more urgently now, the notes rising and falling rapidly, as though to keep pace with a runner's breath. I am not sensitive to heat or cold, but I swear to you, at

that moment it felt as though the river's icy water pumped through my slack veins.

I shivered. Abruptly the whistling stopped. I heard nothing save the breathing of my companions and a soft curse from Rotwang. Then, from somewhere not far ahead of us, a muffled voice asked a question—a soft, insinuating voice, sibilant as a child's, though it belonged to no child. I could not make out the words, nor could I hear its reply; only the bright tone of a small girl, piercing and sweet as birdsong, followed by a clump and, ominously, silence.

"No!"

I broke free of Smith's grasp and shoved my way past the others, grabbing Rotwang's torch. My footsteps echoed like falling stones as I ran.

"Pandora!" shouted Wystan. "Don't be mad!"

I ignored him, and the cries of the others as they gave chase. Before me the tunnel twisted like a corkscrew, and suddenly opened onto a chamber that seemed vast after the confined passage. In fact it was scarcely larger than the inside of Dr. Pretorius's caravan. I stopped in the entrance, fighting panic, and shone my electric torch until its wan beam picked up a shadow in the center of the room. It leaned over a second, smaller shadow on the floor, and I recognized the roundfaced man from the Mondkellar.

The Pfeifer: the Whistler. He was hunched over the prostrate form of a young girl, her face turned toward me, milk-white, her eyes huge and dark and empty.

My breath caught in my throat: he had already killed her. Then the same sweet voice I'd heard earlier cried out plaintively.

"Mutter—hilfe!"

"Mutter?" The Pfeifer looked at me, then laughed and glanced back down at the child. "That is not your mother, child! Nor will she help you . . ."

Before he could speak another word I was on him. "Stop," I hissed, and grabbed him by the throat. The child screamed. "Leave her, you monster—" "Monster!" He choked on the word. His eyes bulged as I slammed him against the wall, the torch falling from my hand. "It's you—"

The girl's voice rose to a hysterical pitch as my companions stumbled into the chamber. I glanced back and saw her staring rigid, at Smith, her mouth a frozen O of disbelief and stark sense. "Stupid girl! He is not your enemy!" I cried.

"Here now," said Wystan. He darted forward and knelt beside the girl, shielding her so that she could see no one beside himself. "Everything's going to be fine. Just look at me and tell me your name."

The girl sniffed. "My—my name?"

"That's right." My—my name? Wystan smiled, then picked up the electric torch from where it had fallen. "See? We've got a nice light, and we're going to find our way back outside, and everything's going to be just ducky."

The girl frowned. "Ducky?"

I turned back to the Pfeifer, tightening my hold on his throat. His curses became a strangled gasp.

"Where are they?" I said through gritted teeth. He tried to shake his head and I smashed him against the wall again. "Don't waste your breath on lies. Tell me where they are, Henry Frankenstein and the rest."

The Pfeifer made a gargling sound. I loosened my grip, just enough that he could speak in a choked whisper.

"There!" He gestured frantically toward the far side of the room. "Through there—the main passage—Unterstadt—behind the sewage tunnels..."

He started coughing and I let go of him. Behind me, Rotwang's figure loomed, with Dr. Pretorius at his side.

"This is him!" said Rotwang in disgust. "The man who slays children!" He kicked the cowering figure on the floor, and the man wailed in pain.

"I didn't mean to!" he cried. "I can't help it—I want to stop, in God's name you must believe me!" His face was a tormented mask of terror and self-loathing and his eyes rolled wildly as an injured dog's. "I have tried!" he moaned. "God, I've tried! And when I sought help at hospital, Dr. Frankenstein swore he'd help me, he said he had the means to stop it, but first I must find more women for him. He said if I found women for him, I could—"

He gave another shrill wail as Rotwang kicked him again. "If you found women, you could seize their children—is that what he promised you? Monster!"

Rotwang raised his arm to strike the helpless figure. Before he could, another hand seized his, and Smith's voice thundered through the chamber.

"No. Leave him!"

Rotwang twisted to stare at the creature. "Are you mad? By his own admission, he's a murderer—the worst kind of murderer, a child killer! He—"

"I said NO!"

Smith pushed Rotwang against the wall. The scientist caught himself before he could fall to the ground, with an effort straightened. He glared first at the Pfeifer, then at Henry Frankenstein's monster.

"You dare defend this filth?" He turned and spat at the pathetic form writhing at his feet. "I have heard of honor among thieves—is this honor among rank brutes?"

"He is no brute." The voice was so low and measured that it was a moment before I recognized it as Smith's. "He is a man, as much as you are. As much as I am. A bad man; a sick man. But

he is a man and not an animal. And you must deal with him as such, with justice but also with pity."

Rotwang's face contorted. He gazed at Smith as though he spoke total gibberish. "Pity?"

"Yes." Smith looked at the child. His mouth tightened, not with anger but with something very close to grief. He stretched out his great hand to touch the girl's forehead, and I saw that his fingers trembled. She stared at him, unblinking, then smiled.

"That is what separates us from those brutes you invoke so easily." "He's right!" squealed the Pfeifer. He gazed imploringly at Smith, and I fought to hide the loathing I felt at his craven display. "I am ill, as much a victim as—"

He looked around wildly, until his gaze fell upon the child he'd kidnapped.

"As she is!" he cried, pointing at her. "Henry Frankenstein swore he'd help me—please, let me find him!"

My companions and I looked at each other.

"He can lead us to Frankenstein," said Dr. Pretorius. "What of the child?" said Wystan. The girl clung to him, finger in her mouth; she stared at us with wide eyes but seemed remarkably unafraid. "We can't leave her here. And we certainly can't bring her with us."

"You'll have to bring her back, Wystan." I turned to the child and asked, "Do you know where you live?" She nodded solemnly. "Good."

I glanced at Wystan, then at her. "This man will take you home, then. Do you understand?" Again she nodded.

Wystan looked pained. "What, I have to miss all the fun?"

"They also serve who return lost nurselings to their grieving parents," intoned Dr. Pretorius.

Wystan frowned, then shrugged. "Oh well. I suppose you're right." He stooped to retrieve his umbrella, setting the girl back onto the ground. "At least Christopher won't lord it

over me. I'll get her home, then find my way back here as fast as I can."

"I think it might be more useful if you could monitor the situation up there," said Dr. Pretorius, and he gestured at the ceiling. "In the event that we don't return. You know, alert the proper authorities and such."

Rotwang snorted, but Wystan agreed. "Good thinking, Septimus. But we'll hope it doesn't come to such a drastic state."

We made hasty farewells. Wystan shook hands with each of us, and cast a gimlet eye upon the Pfeifer.

"I'll make sure the police know about that one," he assured me under his breath, then picked up the little girl and began striding down the tunnel, back toward Rotwang's lair. "All right now, who'd like to hear 'The Dong with the Luminous Nose?'"

"Me!" the girl cried, as the two of them disappeared into the darkness.

Rotwang turned to the Pfeifer, withdrew a small pistol from his pocket and aimed it at the little man's temple. "Suppose you show us where Dr. Frankenstein has made his temporary quarters. This will help remind you, if you find your memory's gone a bit dim."

The Pfeifer moaned softly, then gave us a sickly smile. "Of course, of course. This way—"

He scuttled down the passage like some great overgrown deathwatch beetle, pausing now and then to wipe sweat from his brow or to puzzle over which tunnel we should pursue.

I soon lost track of where we were. It seemed inconceivable that Wystan, or anyone else, would ever be able to find us. The walls were now composed of metal and concrete rather than stone. The tunnels grew wider, ceilings and walls curving down around us as though we walked through a vast pipe—which, Rotwang explained, was pretty close to the truth.

"We're in the old sewage tunnels now," he said, and sniffed ostentatiously. "Truly the bowels of the city."

Dr. Pretorius's nose wrinkled in distaste. "Please, Ivor," Rotwang replied with scorn. "Especially when one considers the company you keep—ambulatory corpses, childkillers, somnambulists..."

I maintained a haughty silence, but beside me I could sense Smith's ill-suppressed rage. "Better a corpse with a conscience than a robot without," he rumbled.

Rotwang glared at him but said nothing more. We continued without speaking. A deep unease fell upon me, exacerbated by the grimness of our surroundings—the dull gray light that cast an embalmed gleam over all of us, not excepting Rotwang and Pretorius and the Pfeifer; the foul smell, which grew fainter but now carried unpleasant overtones of scorched metal and organic decay; the occasional damp retort underfoot, when one of us stepped upon a salamander or millipede. Now and then the Pfeifer would let out a cry or a sudden piercing whistle; whether of disgust or delight or alarm, it was impossible to tell.

But gradually the tunnel leveled out. We could all walk abreast now, and still have room for our absent companions, had they only been at our sides. Only the Pfeifer continued to scurry ahead of us, head bobbing as he wove back and forth across the passageway.

"Here," he announced abruptly, and stopped.

In front of us, the tunnel ended in a metal wall, perhaps twenty feet high. Two immense round doors, bolted and hinged with hardware as large as I was, loomed in the half-light. The doors resembled those on illustrations I had seen of submersible boats, bulging slightly outwards as though behind them something huge and terrible struggled to escape.

"In there?" I took a hesitant step forward and pressed my hand against the convex curve of one of the steel doors. Rust leaked off at my touch, and a dead spider. I gasped.

"It's warm!" I scratched my hand back as though it had been burned and stared wonderingly at the Pfeifer. He nodded.

"Yes—it is like a *Schlachthaus* in there, an abattoir. It is Frankenstein's vision of the world. *Teuflich*."

Helldik He shivered and ticked his lips as though tormented by thirst.

For the first time I felt pity for this tortured little man. Only the most desperate and depraved of humans would seek healing from the likes of Henry Frankenstein. I looked aside at Smith, who stared at the doors as though they truly were the gates of Hell. After a moment he cocked his head, listening.

"He is in there," he murmured. I could hear nothing. Dr. Pretorius and Rotwang crowded alongside me, jostling against the creature as they ran their hands over the metal doors.

"Is there a trick to opening them?" asked Dr. Pretorius. He tapped a series of bolts, then peered at a glass plate that covered a series of complex gauges. "Some sort of code or combination?" Rotwang shook his head. "Nothing that complicated, I'm afraid. These doors weigh three tons apiece. They're counterweighted inside—"

He tugged uselessly at a great lever. "But unless Henry is expecting us—and for our sake, I hope he is *not*—we're stuck."

Dr. Pretorius put a finger to his chin and surveyed the doors musingly. "If only you'd thought to program your fembot to be responsive to your voice, or thoughts. That would have been so useful right about now."

Rotwang glared at him. "Next time," he said through gritted teeth.

His fingers dropped from the lever. I stepped beside him and grasped the metal handle with both hands, took a deep breath, then pulled. Sinews ached and muscles burned as I strove to move it—and then, with a sharp grinding sound, it did.

"It's moving!" I panted.

Dr. Pretorius and Rotwang bumped against me in their haste to grab the lever and help. Then Smith's shadow fell across the door.

"Perhaps this is an instance where brute strength might prevail," he grumbled, and pushed Rotwang aside. "Allow me. Wait, Pandora—I need your help—"

He moved my hands with fastidious care to opposite ends of the lever, then placed his own in the center.

"Now," he commanded, and began to pull.

My bones creaked and I gasped with the effort as the creature shouted aloud in pain; and then, in fractional increments, the lever began to move, until at last it pointed straight up.

"Now," grunted my companion, and he set his shoulder against the rounded door. "Push—"

Together we threw our weight against it. After a moment Rotwang and Dr. Pretorius joined in, the four of us straining as the great portal began to give way.

"Almost—" gasped Dr. Pretorius. "Almost—there—"

And then we were. The door swung inward slowly, with the awful immediacy of a portal opening in a nightmare. Waves of heated air rushed over us, and I blinked in the sudden glare of incandescent lights glowing high overhead. Rotwang shielded his face from the heat.

Then he looked around, searching for something—someone—and turned back to us in dismay.

"The Pfeifer—where is he?"

Dr. Pretorius and I stared at each other.

"I—wasn't watching him," I admitted. I looked up at the creature. "Smith, were you?"

"No." His face creased with anger. "He's gone. But we can do nothing now."

"He will betray us!" said Rotwang. "So be it." The creature's ominous tone echoed the rumbling of the door as it had opened. "Justice will find him and strike him down. I will not waste my time hunting him now. There are others we must find, before they unleash greater horrors. You fear one child killer, one murderer? Imagine scores of them, hundreds—that is what Henry Frankenstein and his wife will loose upon the city."

"I thought his intent was to enslave women," I said, "so that they would do his bidding and become slaves of men everywhere."

"Frankenstein will do that, and worse," intoned Smith. "He will enslave men as well as women, and find it no difficult feat. Frankenstein believes that no man will question the provenance of a wife who is little more than a walking corpse, so long as she caters to his desires and hunger. Such a man can be easily bent to Frankenstein's will—and if he is not, he is easily slain by a mistress who is already dead and has no fear of damnation."

"Yes," whispered Rotwang. His eyes took on a feral gleam. "And the women he has resurrected, those he murdered, or disinterred—he chose them all for their beauty. Even in death they possess an eldritch loveliness—as do you, Pandora," he murmured, and turned that lantern gaze upon me. "I might have done much with you myself, if I had possessed such beauty and intelligence as raw materials when I designed my robotic woman."

"Enough!" said Dr. Pretorius in an urgent whisper. He gestured into the chamber before us. "Be careful..."

I scowled. None of us needed to be warned.

Yet it seemed impossible that we could enter unseen. The room was cavernous, but the overhead lights alone brought us noontide. Loudspeakers hung from the ceiling, and the walls were lined with paired lenses that looked disturbingly like eyes. Yet we had no recourse but to proceed. I drew a deep breath, then walked into the room with the others close behind me.

"Pandora, wait—"

Smith grabbed me before I could take more than three steps.

"Look," he said, and pointed.

The four of us stood at the top of a large space like an amphitheater. There were no seats, just terraced levels crowded with equipment such as we had glimpsed back in Rotwang's laboratory—metal tables, bundles of glass tubes, coils of electrical wire, spectrum analyzers, oscilloscopes, generators, electrogravimetric analyzers, glass vials filled with colorless liquid, and a more viscous substance that looked like blood.

Dr. Pretorius joined us. As he gazed downward, his ascetic's face grew grave.

"The devil," he murmured.

At the bottom of the amphitheater, rows of cots filled the floor, like a makeshift hospital—or morgue. There were motionless figures on the cots, covered by white sheets. A small nightstand stood beside each cot, and tubes and wires trailed from beneath the cements.

Oddly, as I stared, it seemed less like a hospital than a bizarre dormitory filled with patients like Cesare, all fallen magically into slumber.

But no sleepers drowsed as silently as these. There was no stirring of breath, not the faintest twitch or moan of dreams plucked; no soft motion as chests rose and fell. No hand plucked at those white sheets.

And no head stirred as I started toward the floor of the amphitheater.

"Pandora!"

Behind me I heard Dr. Pretorius's warning voice, followed by Rotwang's curse and the creature's heavy tread upon the stairs. I ignored them all as I ran, not pausing until I reached the floor.

And halted.

Silence, as the others paused on the level just above where I stood. An eerie stillness filled the chamber, as terrifying as it was familiar. I felt possessed of a strange certainty, that I had known this place before—no, not this place, but this silence, this void.

Because despite the brilliant, unshaded bulbs that hung far overhead; despite the presence of my companions and all those unmoving figures, I felt utterly alone.

More than simply alone: I was marooned, bereft—thrust into a darkness so great that everything around me disappeared, cots, walls, ceiling, floor, even my own body. It was as though I had fallen into some invisible alembic and there dissolved, flesh and hair and bone, my cells burned away in an unseen conflagration that left nothing but this single spark of consciousness, an atom of horror insubstantial and deadly as a virus.

Dead, I thought. *I am dead.*

It was not an insight, but a memory. Dr. Pretorius had once explained a discovery he had made during the process of creating me.

"It will be years before others learn of this," he'd said, "decades even; but, dear Pandora, perhaps it is knowledge well deferred . . ."

What he had learned is it takes a long time for a person to die. The central organs go first, heart and liver and lungs; the blood pools and coagulates, the muscles go slack then rigid as rigor mortis sets in.

But the cells within our brains continue to live and sparkle like the flaming trails thrown off by a Catherine wheel. Medical

students are taught that the brain is like a sponge, a lumpen gray thing as mundane as its workings are miraculous.

But, Dr. Pretorius had assured me, "The brain is wonderful and populous as a coral reef! And someday, men—and women—will learn how to navigate that reef, explore its chasms and trace the luminous pathways between its folds, capture its electricity the way students once trapped lightning in a bottle. That is when we will truly learn how to steal fire from the gods. That is when we may at last dream of creating a true, a noble Prometheus!"

At that moment, frozen in my steps at the center of Dr. Frankenstein's operating theater, I remembered my own death. The abyss that had swallowed me, a darkness where I had known nothing, neither pain nor fear nor even my name; only a flickering consciousness that there *was* a void. And if I knew that, then there was also, somewhere, an *I*.

A roar sounded in my ears, a thrumming as though my head had grown engorged with blood. I saw nothing, but then the roar subsided and another sound pulsed inside my skull, a woman's voice, muffled as though she spoke through a heavy scarf. The voice fragmented into a series of pops, a sound like tiny bladders bursting. The woman's voice grew hushed, then exultant. I heard a plosive gasp, as when a drowning man surfaces above the water, and then a second, familiar voice—Henry Frankenstein's—followed by another that I recognized.

"Pandora! Pandora, can you hear me?"

I shook my head—once more, it seemed, I had one to shake. Then I blinked—I had eyes again as well—and looked up to see Dr. Pretorius. He grasped my hand and spoke to me in a low monotone.

"She's entered a fugue state," he explained to someone I could not see. For a moment my earlier terror rushed back—the woman's voice, the realization that I was dead.

Then I saw that Smith stood beside Dr. Pretorius, flanked by Rorwang. Behind them stretched the rows of cots. I was not dead.

But once, I had been.

"No," I said. It hurt to speak. "No, I'm here . . ."

"Good girl," Dr. Pretorius looked around worriedly, but there was no sign of anyone else. He turned back to me and said, "The presence of so many like yourself must have triggered a profound dissociation. If I'd known what we would find here, I would have forbidden you to come."

"Find what?" I demanded. The memory of what I had just experienced had its claws in me. Not in the manner a nightmare digs into one's consciousness; more like the persistent traces left by fever or lingering illness, a sense of pain and dread embedded in my bones and musculature flowed within my veins, blossoming horror instead of blood.

My gaze fell upon the nearest cot. I pushed Dr. Pretorius aside, grabbed the corner of the white sheet, and yanked it off. What lay beneath might have been myself, reflected in the mirror of my bleakest dreams. A woman lay upon her back as though asleep. Her exposed flesh was blue-white, like weak milk. A seam ran down the center of her chest, and opened to reveal her organs—heart, lungs, her stomach's flaccid pouch, a knotted rope of intestines. Instead of blood, silvery wires that traced the labyrinth of veins beneath the surface of her skin. My gaze moved from this cavity to her throat and face, the unruly tracery of stitches that indicated where two corpses had been pieced together like an infernal doll. Even in death, her face possessed the loveliness Rorwang had spoken of: delicate features, full mouth, her dark eyes open if unseeing.

Another seam ran across her forehead. Above it her skull had been split and the upper part pulled back, like the split halves of a mollusk shell still connected by a thin web of flesh. Within the opening glistened a gray-pink object like a huge

nut-meat, its folds strung with fine gold wires like the most expensive embroidery thread. The wires joined to form a single braid that led to the nightstand beside the cot, and the braided wires then fed into a single electrical receptor. I leaned close to examine this, and as I did heard a very faint humming, quieter than the breath of a sleeping infant.

She's alive, I thought. The horror I'd felt minutes earlier returned, and with it a sudden, sickening realization: *this is how people perceive me*.

I recoiled. As I did someone caught my hand.

"No," he said. I looked up and saw Smith. His gargoyle's features, those dark, deepset eyes in a face pale as that of the woman on the cot beside me; both of them—and myself—trapped between death and life, like wasp in honey.

Smith shook his head. "It is not that way," he said. "Not with you, or with me."

I turned and stared at all those others: each deep in dreamless sleep. None of their skulls were exposed as the first woman's was—but all had been violated, each brain tethered to our world by a slender braid of shining wire.

And each braid fell from its receptor to the floor, twisting in sinuous loops and curves to a single platform not far from where I stood. Here all the wires fed into a slender golden cylinder that turned and gave off waves of spectral light, amethyst and silver and periwinkle-blue: the source of whatever twilight life those motionless forms shared.

"Nurslings of immortality," said Dr. Pretorius. He stared at the dead woman and shook his head.

"Perhaps not," I said softly. "But . . ."

My voice trailed off. I could not express what I felt: that of all the strange and terrible things I had seen since awakening all those months before, this was the most troubling.

I believed that the Children of Cain deserved life. And there was no doubt of my respect and, perhaps, affection for the creature we now called Smith.

Yet in these others I sensed what I can only call a *wrongness*. Despite their superficial resemblance to me, despite the fact that I knew their origins were equal to my own—I believed that immortality, bought at such a price, was an evil thing.

I did not look up. I was aware of Dr. Pretorius and Rotwang watching me, and sensed Rotwang's impatience.

Yet Dr. Pretorius's face held a strange disquiet—neither disapproval nor fear, but something tinged more with regret, a deep aching sadness I had never before seen him display.

"This is not right," I said. I turned and looked at Dr. Pretorius. "I know that I am here now because you performed such an intervention upon me, but—"

I lay my hand upon the cheek of the dead woman beside me. "I will not countenance such a thing now. Henry Frankenstein butchered these women. I will not see them revived as slaves. Better that they be returned to their families and brought to final rest in familiar ground, than that they live forever in servitude."

"And if that had been you, Pandora?" Smith asked in a low voice. "Would you have forsaken consciousness and the second life you have been given?"

I gazed at him steadily. "I have received a gift, and I am grateful. But I am not afraid to die a second time."

"Prettily put, Pandora!"

A voice rang through the room. We all turned.

On the uppermost level of the amphitheater stood a woman. Tall and imperious, her fair hair loose around a face lovely as it was cruel, she wore a man's trousers and waistcoat and riding boots.

"Yet I am disappointed to hear you speak those words," she went on. "From a man, perhaps, they would seem more natural,

but from a woman twice-born? I had hoped for more from you. Still, as a wise man wrote in a wise book, 'Immortal or immortal, here you die.' Words to that effect, anyway."

"Elizabeth!" The creature uttered the word as though it were an imprecation, but the woman only laughed.

"You have more lives than a cat, *Herr Leiche*," she said. "Would that my husband had been so lucky; but he, alas, only has two—"

She raised her hand in a commanding gesture. From the shadows behind her emerged a brilliant figure.

"Elfi!" gasped Rotwang. He leapt toward the stairs, but Dr. Pretorius grabbed him.

"Stay," he said, and pulled him back.

Because the fembot was not alone. A shambling creature stood at her side, its clothing soiled and streaked with brown—dirt, I thought at first.

But then I saw where its shirt gaped open to display a white chest bisected with a ragged line, crimson and black. And I saw other, no less ragged scars across its neck and temples, and upon its sagging cheeks; and saw too its vacant, rolling eyes, and the thin trail of spittle that fell from its mouth as it lolled drunkenly alongside the upright, glittering form of Rotwang's fembot.

"Henry," gasped Dr. Pretorius, horror struck.

"Behold your master!" cried Elizabeth Frankenstein. "It was not enough that he create an army of women to serve him and his colleagues: he would have his wife serve him as well! But I learned of his intent, though I made no mention of it to him. Then, just days ago, I found him in the embrace of another woman."

Her face crinkled with disgust. Then she laughed, and pointed at Rotwang.

"Yet it was no human woman, but a mechanical one—your renegade robot! Poor deluded Henry—he had no inkling that

I had bent Elfi to my will and commanded her to seduce him. With her assistance I easily overpowered him.

"And so the traitor met the fate he intended for me," she ended, drunkenly at Elfi's side.

"Zezel!" Rotwang swore beneath his breath, but his expression was tinged with admiration, even as Elizabeth turned her disdain upon him.

"Hypocrite! You had no such compunctions when you created your fembot! You gave no thought to the possibility that, in your hubris and inexperience, you might create Lilith as easily as Eve. No—the giving and taking of Life is far too important a matter to be left to the likes of men. The time has come for those of us most suited to the task to join forces. Pandora!"

My name echoed like a tocsin through the chamber, as she extended her hand to me. "Come! Elfi is a fair companion, but she is not human and never will be. You have been, and are—join me, Pandora. Together with Elfi, we will be like the Three Fates, watching over the world."

I did not speak. Instead I gazed up at Elizabeth Frankenstein, and Elfi beside her—the mortal woman and the mechanical one, both beautiful, both powerful, both possessed of an intellect I could not easily argue with.

Elfi's sleek limbs glowed beneath the room's dazzling lamps, and her eyes blazed more brilliantly than any human woman's ever could. Her body would never slacken with age. She would never cry out during childbirth, or lovemaking, or weep beside the body of a loved one.

But had I ever done those things while I was first alive? Would I ever do them now?

"You know that Elizabeth speaks the truth." The voice was Elfi's, chill as March rain. "And while her words might be colored by emotion, mine are not and never will be."

She stepped toward me, lambent eyes unblinking. She pointed at Rotwang, and even this accusatory gesture was graceful in a temple-dancer's.

"Men will never change," she pronounced. "He will never change. That is why my very existence is to him a betrayal because I can change, and did. What does it say of men, that their creations can transform themselves, when they cannot?"

I had no reply. I knew the truth in what she said, and in Elizabeth's words too.

And yet are people ever ruled wholly by the truth? I thought of the legend from which I had drawn my name, Pandora. I knew it was not true in any literal sense, and one moral to be drawn from it—Woman as the cause of Humanity's misfortune—was cruel and egregious. Yet there was solace amidst despair and confusion, hope survives.

I had been created to serve as mate to a monstrous brute; yet the monster had changed, and proven himself worthy of my respect. If Henry Frankenstein had ever been capable of such a sea-change—and I do not believe he was—he would never have the opportunity now. And yes, his followers had sought to destroy me, or enslave me, as the pathetic and monstrous Pfeifer had preyed upon helpless children.

But there had been other men, men who had cherished and aided me without asking anything in return, save my friendship. I turned to look upon Dr. Pretorius, who gazed back at me with a melancholy smile, his hands open as though in benediction. Beside him stood Rotwang, who, despite his own dubious ambitions and fears, had accompanied us to this dark place and not fled. I thought of Christopher and Wystan, of Wendigo and Cesare, all of whom had seen beyond the husk of a woman's corpse, to glimpse the mind within my ravaged shell.

Case of 26. I thought of Smith. I looked at him, his towering, black-and-white body and scarred face, his deepest eyes fixed upon me yet betraying nothing of what he felt.

But I knew this was not because he cared nothing for my choice; it was because he acknowledged it was my decision, and he would not sway me in it.

I turned back to Elizabeth Frankenstein and her cohort, and shook my head.

"No." My voice sounded frail in that echoing space, but I didn't care. "No, I won't join with you, Elizabeth. You may be right, that men are by their very nature evil—or it may be better, because you allied yourself with an evil man, you helped begot evil in others. But your experience is not mine, and my choice is not yours. I will remain here with my friends. And I will not allow you to enslave these others."

I stepped toward the platform that held the glowing cylinder, thrust my fingers through its mass of braided wires, and grasped the receptacle with both hands. It was warm to the touch and seemed to hum with life, as though I clasped a hive of golden bees.

I began to lift it. The wires grew taut as I turned, readying myself to heave it across the room and so destroy the last link all those half-dead figures had with our world.

"Stop!" Elizabeth shouted, pointing at two still forms at the foot of the stairs where she stood. "If you destroy them, you will have murdered your friends as well."

I froze. Smith groaned as Dr. Pretorius darted forward and tore the sheets from the cots.

"Thea." He stared in horror at her lifeless form. I looked at Thea, her dark hair matted on her forehead, her eyes closed. She resembled a dreaming child, her mouth inexplicably turned upward in a small smile. I blinked as something stung my eyes—tears—and without thinking cried her name aloud.

"Thea!"

Her smile widened; the closed lids twitched then, miraculously, opened.

"Pandora?" she murmured, and tried to turn her head. "Is that—"

"She's alive!" Rotwang rushed to Dr. Pretorius's side. He bent to press his ear against Thea's chest and she pushed him aside.

"Hey," she said thickly. "Get off me, you . . ."

Quickly Rotwang turned and yanked the sheet from the cot beside her. Lulu lay there, her black lacquered bob seemingly untouched, her lily-white face no paler in death than it had been in life. Rotwang lowered his face to hers, listening, then crowed in triumph.

"This one's alive, too!"

"Traitorous fool!" Elizabeth Frankenstein screeched at the fembot. "You didn't slay them?"

The robot woman stared at her unperturbed.

"There was no time," she replied in her calm, chiming voice. "You demanded that I see to your husband first. I did as you requested. I will see to these others now."

"It is too late for that."

Smith's voice thundered through the chamber. Two long steps and he was at my side, his great hands beside mine as together we held the golden cylinder and lifted it as though it were a great glowing chalice. Rotwang and Dr. Pretorius had grabbed Lulu and Thea, and were helping them to their feet. The young women stumbled, then straightened and wrapped the white cerements around themselves, Grecian-style.

"Pandora." Smith gazed down at me, his broken face gilded with the cylinder's eerie light. "Are you sure this is what you wish?"

I nodded. The cylinder throbbed in my hands. Its warmth now burned me; its glow deepened to a fiery crimson and the wires whipped against my skin in lashes of flame. A moon escaped Smith. He was rigid with terror but willing to withstand it for my sake.

"Yes," I said. "This is what I wish. They are dead. Let them rest in peace."

We raised the cylinder above our heads. Its aureole blinded me so I could see nothing save the silhouette of Henry's Frankenstein's monster, black against that radiant false sun. There was a strangled cry from the top of the amphitheater, as with all our strength we hurled it at Elizabeth and the fembot, and Henry Frankenstein between them.

"No!"

With a shriek, Elizabeth turned to flee. A deafening explosion tore through the chamber. The shining cylinder smashed onto the floor and erupted into a penumbra of flame that enveloped the three figures. Elizabeth's shriek became an anguished scream as her husband's living corpse toppled onto her in a deadly embrace. Flames engulfed them and Elfi's crystal form, as though it were blazing wine poured into a goblet.

Yet the Fembot did not move, even as the two beside her grappled and burned, until all three were swallowed by the conflagration.

"Pandora! This way—"

Someone pulled me from where I stood, gazing as though bewitched at the destruction of Henry and Elizabeth Frankenstein. I turned, and saw the room around me ablaze. The braided wires had turned to tributaries of flame racing across the floor; sheets of fire leapt from cot to cot, mercifully blinding me to the havoc wrought upon all those lifeless forms. I could not see who my savior was, only stumble choking through the haze of smoke

and flame, fire licking at my hands and face, the very air ablaze so that it hurt to breathe.

And then, suddenly, blessedly, there was darkness. The heat died away as though a door had been slammed. Around me voices called out to one another in panic and relief; there was a pale flash, and the feeble glow of an electric torch flickered across the faces of my companions—Thea, Lulu, Dr. Pretorius, Rotwang and—

"Smith!" I cried, and grabbed his arm. "You're all right..."

"Pandora," he said, and smiled.

"No time for merry meetings yet!" exclaimed Dr. Pretorius. He swept his torch so that we could see the tunnel around us. "That blaze will consume all that remains of the chamber, but it will consume us as well! Fires knows nothing of friend or foe. Follow me—"

We stumbled through the tunnel. When I glanced back, I saw eerie flashes of gold and scarlet that grew larger, infernal nightmares birthed within that subterranean womb. And fast as we ran, the heat pursued us as well. More than once Thea and Lulu stumbled, until Dr. Pretorius and Smith grabbed them and half-carried, half-pulled them through the passage.

"I can't go on," Lulu gasped. "Please, I'll only slow you down—" And then a familiar sound rang through the dim space: a high-pitched, bone-freezing whicker, as of a blade slicing through solid rock.

"That's Schattengeist!"

I staggered forward, then shook my head in amazement as a figure loomed in front of us—many figures, though the central one towered above them, a blazing torch in his hand as he greeted us from where he sat upon the demonic horse.

"I thought you'd never get here," he said, and grinned.

"Wendigo!" I stared at him, dumbstruck. Behind him I could just make out several other figures.

"Schattengeist!" Dr. Pretorius cried in delight. The horse raised its head, sparks showering everywhere as it let out a piercing shriek.

of recognition.

"I told you I'd take good care of him," said Wendigo. He slid from the horse, then helped Dr. Pretorius hoist Thea and Lulu onto Schattengeist's back. When he was finished he turned and embraced me.

"But how did you find us?" I asked in disbelief.

Wendigo shrugged and cocked a thumb over his shoulder. "My tribe has its ways of getting news," he said, as three men stepped from the shadows. "And we have friends everywhere. Even—especially—in the darker corners of the city."

"Hullo, Pandora," said Christopher. "Smith, you're looking exceptionally well, all things considered."

Cesare ran to the great horse and grasped his sister's hand. "Thea! You're alive!"

Thea shrugged, then grinned. "Sure I'm alive." She ran a hand through her filthy hair and grimaced. "I've had hangovers worse than this. Not many, but a few."

"Well-played, Pandora." Wystan reached to tap me with the tip of his umbrella. "Come along, we've engaged a hire-cab in the street, but he won't wait forever."

Dr. Pretorius climbed onto Schattengeist. Behind him, Thea and Lulu peered down like figures from a rather louché Greek vase.

"Pandora!" Thea blew a kiss and Lulu saluted as Smith and I joined the others on our final trek from the Understadt.

CHAPTER 15

Schattengeist's hooves strike sparks and his fiery breath a glowing corona in the shadows ahead of us. But gradually the darkness lifted, until we were outside.

I had been anticipating daylight; instead a hazy dusk greeted us, hardly more bright than the tunnel we had just fled.

But the chill air, redolent of smoke and rotting cabbage, was sweeter far than any fragrance I could imagine, and the foggy Berlin twilight more welcome than the brightest dawn.

"Here we go," announced Wystan. He strode toward a long black automobile parked along the curb and threw open the back door. "Your chariot awaits."

In the front seat, the driver yawned and hardly seemed to notice the bizarre parade that proceeded into the dim street: Dr. Pretorius and Thea and Lulu astride an immense, flame-breathing black horse; the sepulchral Cesare; Wendigo in his Tyrolean hat and macabre ornaments; Wystan sporting his black umbrella and Christopher with his boyish grin; Rotwang looking around furtively.

And, last of all, Smith and myself.

"Where you headed?" the cab driver demanded. For the first time he seemed to take us all in, and with a frown shook his head. "What is this, a circus? I don't have room for all of you!"

Thea slid from Schattengeist's back. Lulu laughed, then with a toss of her bobbed head somersaulted to the ground. The cabdriver gaped in admiration.

"Take us to the Mondkellar," she ordered, and hopped into the back of the car. "Next floor show's in half an hour."

"Me too," said Thea. She grabbed my hand and started to pull me after her. "You coming, Pandora?"

I hesitated, then shook my head. "Not tonight. Maybe another time."

Thea threw her arms around me. "Don't forget!" she said. She kissed Cesare goodbye, tousling his hair; then hugged Wendigo warily stroked Schattengeist's muzzle, then pointed behind the cab. "We brought this along, Schattengeist and I. I figured some of you might be looking for a way out of the city."

And yes, there was Dr. Pretorius's gypsy caravan, neatly repaired, with a row of grotesque faces pressed against the window, eyes rolling wildly and mouths open in delighted howls. Christopher stared at the Children of Cain, then shook his head and turned to the cab.

"We'll go with you girls," he announced.

He kissed my cheek. "Nice meeting you, Pandora. Hope you'll stop by again some time. I have an American friend I'd like you to meet, a singer—she performs at another club not far from here."

He clambered into the car with Thea and Lulu. Wystan shook hands with Dr. Pretorius and Cesare, then with me, and last of all with Smith.

"I'll miss you, my friend," said the Englishman. "But you know where to find us."

He too climbed inside the cab. A chorus of farewells rang out as the engine roared to life, and everyone waved as it disappeared into the night.

"Rotwang?" Dr. Pretorius pointed to where Wendigo had already led Schattengeist to the caravan, and was settling him into the traces. "Care to join us?"

The scientist shook his head. "Thank you, Septimus. But no. I have further research to do here. My prototype was destroyed."

but I have her successor to perfect. And this time, perhaps, I will not fail."

With a self-mocking bow he spun upon his heels and hurried back down the alley.

"Well then," said Dr. Pretorius. He surveyed those who remained with a smile. "That leaves us almost where we started. Pandora, Cesare, myself—"

"And me," called Wendigo. He leaned over to tap the caravan window and smile at one of the Children of Cain inside. "I've gotten fond of these fellows here—like something out of one of Blackwood's better stories. Mind if I join you?"

"Of course," said Dr. Pretorius.

He turned his gaze to the looming figure beside me. "And you, my friend—will you accompany us as well?"

Smith made a terse sound deep in his throat, then looked down at me. "It is not my decision to make," he said.

I gazed up at him: the sadness graven into his face, the furrowed lines left by fear and rage and sorrow; his deepset eyes, fixed now upon me with no threat, no fury, nothing but unspoken longing.

"But it is mine," I said, and took his hand. "Will you come with us?"

The creature stared at me. His mouth parted, and hoarsely as though he had just learned to speak, he voiced a single word.

"Wife?"

I cocked my head and thought.

"Better than that," I said at last, and tightening my fingers around his I drew him toward the caravan. "Helpmate—and true friend."

THE END